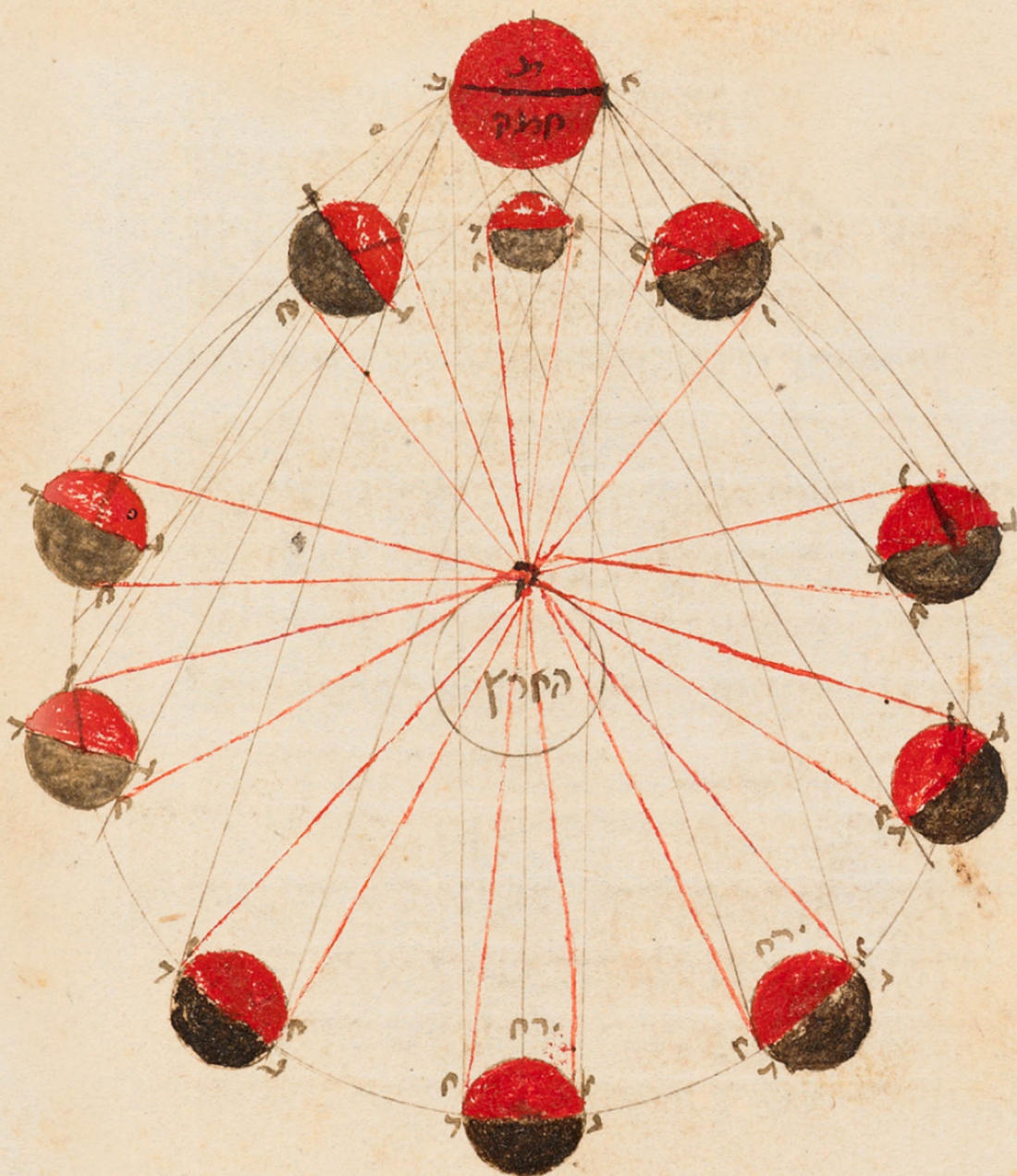


The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus

Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia

MAUD KOZODOY



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The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus

PROFAYT DURAN AND JEWISH IDENTITY
IN LATE MEDIEVAL IBERIA

Maud Kozodoy

PENN

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Introduction

One summer day in 1392, *magister* Honoratus de Bonafide, a Christian physician and astrologer of King Joan I of Aragon, appeared before Bernard Fabre, a Perpignan notary. He was accompanied by Mosse Alfaquim, a Jew, also of Perpignan, who was acting as his proctor. The three men had known each other for years. Bernard Fabre had recorded Honoratus's financial transactions for over a decade, since as early as 1380, and had done so several times over the previous two years.¹ But this time the notary must have looked at the two men before him with surprise and some emotion—perhaps embarrassment or sympathy, perhaps amusement or mockery. One can even imagine Fabre commenting on the awkwardness or irony of the situation. Through all these years of doing business with Honoratus, he had known him by a different name and even as a different person: as Profayt Duran *judeus*.²

During the previous summer of 1391, anti-Jewish riots had broken out in Seville and, taking different forms in the highly diverse regions of Iberia, had spread through Castile to the Crown of Aragon, up to the northernmost parts of Catalonia.³ Jewish quarters were attacked, Jews were killed, and Jewish property was destroyed. Some Jews were dragged to the baptismal font and there converted to save their lives. Others died fighting or committed suicide rather than submit to baptism.⁴

In Perpignan, when the *Call* (the Jewish quarter) was attacked that August, the local Jews took refuge in the royal palace.⁵ Sporadic violence seems to have continued until the late spring of 1393, with

considerable physical injury to person and property. In July of that year, Joan I gave a general pardon to the Christians of Perpignan, but explicitly excluded from this pardon those who had carried out attacks on Jews.⁶ Still, the atmosphere remained sufficiently threatening for a number of Jews to stay in the palace until 1394 or even later. Yet with a strong royal presence in the city, the Jewish community of Perpignan, unlike many others, survived more or less intact; only a handful of Jews were forced to convert.⁷ Among that handful was Profayt Duran.⁸

We can only speculate how Bernard Fabre addressed Duran on that day in 1392, and wonder at the tenor of their encounter. What instantly jumps out at us is that even in the immediate aftermath of the riots, when tensions were presumably still relatively high, a forced convert to Christianity—with the same Jewish partner as formerly, in front of the same Christian notary—could be found continuing his financial activities as though little had changed. But when, looking closer, we begin to consider the complexity of the situation, the questions only multiply.

Fabre was obviously aware of Duran's change of religious status. Was he also aware that it was the result of forced baptism? Certainly he would also have known about the destruction of property and loss of life in the Jewish quarter of Perpignan. He might even have participated in the riots. Did he harbor any sense of responsibility, as a Christian and a citizen of Perpignan? As one of the notaries to whom the Jews habitually turned to record their financial activities, familiar with many by sight and with some quite well, how might he have felt?

And Duran? Standing before an official Christian notary as an unwilling convert to Christianity, did he find it expedient to signal identification with his new religion at the expense of his still-Jewish friend Alfaquim? If so, how might that have been expressed? They were not meeting in church, after all, or in a parochial context. What kind of behavior was required in this situation? Or was a discreet silence preserved by all? And what about Alfaquim's attitude, both toward Duran, and toward his own Jewish status? Evidently he had not deemed it necessary to disassociate himself in business matters from the *converso* standing next to him. But Duran was one of only a very few converts in Perpignan in those years; most had been saved, while others had fled or been killed. Was Mosse sympathetic, resentful, suspicious? If they had been friends before, were they still?

That we are unable to answer most of these questions should alert us to the dangers of making assumptions about what conversion

(forced or otherwise) meant for Jews in late medieval Iberia. While we know minimally that it included the physical act of baptism and that it resulted in a legal change of status, there are large uncertainties about other changes in appearance or behavior, even the most mundane. More intangible matters, such as attitudes or beliefs, are usually even less available to us.

An examination of Profayt Duran and his extant writings may not answer the above questions, but it can provide insight into the complexities of forced conversion. And we have a rich variety of textual material to draw on. Both before and after his conversion, Duran studied and privately taught astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy, producing Hebrew commentaries on, for example, ibn Rushd's abbreviation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the first book of ibn Sina's *al-Qānūn fi-l-ṭibb* ("Canon of Medicine"), and Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. Later, Duran's Hebrew writings expanded in range—and took a surprising direction.

Best known among his postconversion writings are two anti-Christian polemical works: *Al tehi ka-avotekha* ("Be Not Like Your Fathers," c. 1395), a sarcastic epistle of "praise" that actually pours scorn on a recent *voluntary* convert to Christianity, and *Kelimat ha-goyim* ("Shame of the Nations," c. 1397), a serious historical and textual attack on contemporary Christianity as a corruption of Jesus' words and life. In addition, there are *Heshev ha-Efod* ("Cincture/Computation of the *Efod*," 1395), a concise work on the astronomical concepts behind the Jewish calendar; a 1393 funeral eulogy for a Girona rabbi; and *Ma'aseh Efod* ("Work of the *Efod*," 1403), a treatise on Hebrew grammar. One book, a historical record of the persecutions of the Jewish people, is lost.⁹

Several of Duran's works were thus written when he was living as a *converso* and are hence of exceptional interest. Take, for example, the eulogy (*hesped*) that Duran composed in the winter of 1393 for Rabbi Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi of Girona, who had perished as a result of the 1391 riots. Near the end of this lengthy *hesped*, Duran half-apologizes to the deceased's son for not having been able to deliver his tribute in person, openly. In so saying, he alludes to his own forced conversion in a vivid image of flooding waters, expresses the agony of having to all appearances forsaken the religion of his fathers, and hints at the resultant dichotomy of a life in which inner orientation cannot correspond to outward practice. Repeated substitute terms for secrecy suggest some of the need to hide his identity, and the likely

impossibility, for many reasons, of a newly converted Jew publicly eulogizing a rabbinic leader. “I have seen [fit], my brother, to arrange this [eulogy] for the honor of the elevated sage, the honored poet, your father of blessed memory, in secret and in hiding, for the Lord my God has silenced me and poured over me poisonous waters to drunkenness and to satiety. The malicious waters [*mayim zedonim*] have flooded me, a stream has passed over my head, *this wickedness* (Zech. 5:8). . . . In secret his [Duran’s] soul (bound to yours) weeps, for is he not of another faith? Strange is his deed and alien his worship (cf. Is. 28:21). Your brother the Levite, whose song has been spoiled. This is his name forever and his memorial: *Efod*.”¹⁰ In its bitter tone, and its carefully oblique allusions to Duran’s own plight, the passage is highly evocative. That the *mayim zedonim* (“malicious waters”) are the waters of baptism is evident; in rabbinic literature, *malkhut zadon* (“kingdom of malice”) refers to the Roman Empire, and so by extension to Christianity. Into the last line, too, Duran weaves the term ‘*avodah zarah*, idol worship (lit: “strange work”), equating his own worship, Christianity, with idolatry.

It is here, too, that Duran proclaims his name to be “*Efod*.” It was common practice for a commentator to sign his glosses in the margins of a manuscript with an abbreviation of his name preceded by an initial *aleph* for *amar* (“said”). Following that custom, Duran would naturally always have signed his own marginal glosses with the acronym of “*amar profayt duran*”—namely, the letters *alef peh dalet*, spelling out *Efod*. By coincidence, however, *efod* is also the Hebrew word for one of the garments worn by the high priest in the Temple, a term redolent of the historical moment when the Jewish people were at their most splendid and triumphant.

By consciously taking his glossator’s signature as a pseudonym, Duran makes a symbolic statement about his new existence. As far as the church was concerned, the name Profayt Duran was no longer his; taking a new, Christian name was an integral part of the conversion process and represented rebirth into a new life. By reclaiming his old name in disguised form, and simultaneously transforming it by way of an emblem of the glories of the Jewish past, Duran silently signals his rejection of his new Christian identity.

And there is yet another facet to the term *efod*. Duran was a consummate master of multilayered allusion. Earlier in the eulogy itself, he had expounded at length on a well-known passage in the Talmud (b. Zev. 88b) in which each of the priestly garments is said to “atone”

for a specific sin. The *efod* is one of those garments, and the sin it atones for is idolatry.¹¹ In the literary activities Duran undertook after his forced conversion, then, “Efod” is at once a recovered name and a symbolic garment in and through which, as a member of the ancient priestly tribe of Levites, he means to effect expiation for the sins he has been compelled to commit publicly.

In this brief passage we can see already how illuminating Duran’s case can be. Here, in the concluding portion of the text, Duran’s tone is apologetic, but not by reason of any sin of his own. As he presents it here, conversion is, if anything, a divine punishment, of which he himself is a victim. But in the body of the eulogy he has taken this point further; not only does he defend the *conversos* (and by extension himself), but he also points an accusing finger at certain Jews who, by their rote, unfelt performance of the commandments, have removed divine protection from the Jewish people and who should thus bear an onus of blame for the riots of 1391. This indictment may well suggest a level of genuine anger at those, still Jews, who deem themselves superior to *conversos*, the latter having presumably lost, along with their ability to perform the commandments, their portion in the world to come.

We shall return to this remarkable document later on. For our purposes here, it suffices to note the pains taken by Duran in the conclusion to emphasize his unbroken identification with the Jewish people. As he puts it, his own soul is still “bound” to the Jewish soul of his correspondent, whom he calls “brother,” and he ends with an allusion to their common status as Levites. Externally—legally, socially—he may be defined as a Christian; internally, through the soul and through common lineage, he is a Jew.

Duran was in many ways typical of his class and world, and could not have been the sole individual who found a way of rationalizing nonobservance under the circumstances of forced conversion. Still, we should not generalize too broadly. There was a wide variety of responses to this situation. Duran opens a window and shines an especially brilliant light onto one of them.

Profayt Duran’s significance resides not only in his experience of forced conversion but also in another realm, seemingly unrelated but actually, in the Iberian-Jewish world, integral to his and others’

identity. This is the realm of rationalism and scientific activity. His scientific activities and writings, in and of themselves, tell us much about the consumption and transmission of the sciences by Jews in late medieval Iberia. Beyond this, his conception of Judaism as a fundamentally rational religion, one with a proud heritage of scientific learning, played a central role in his polemical works. Attending to this aspect of things can illuminate the attitudes, motivations, and self-perception of an entire class of medieval Jewish scholars.

In the case of Duran, extant are scientific epistles he composed to fellow scholars, collections of his writings by students, notes from study circles, and the recorded evidence of his insights in the margins of manuscripts used in those circles. By looking at these traces of Duran's teaching activity, we see a rarely examined facet of Iberian science at the transition point between the medieval and early modern periods: namely, the transmission of mathematical and astronomical knowledge through small groups.

The content of this transmission, as we will see, exhibits many of the qualities—pragmatism, utilitarianism, technological emphasis—characteristic of the same urban culture and royal patronage system that made Jews and *conversos* such an important factor in Iberian science in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. At the same time, other qualities in Duran's work would seem to derive from more internal factors, in particular the powerful influence of Maimonides' *Guide*.

The central puzzle of Profayt Duran's life is how to understand his literary production in the context of his forced baptism. Most *conversos* from 1391 left no writings at all. Among the few exceptions, some evidently found it possible to continue to compose in Hebrew; Solomon da Piera was one, but he confined himself to the relatively innocuous realm of verse. We can presume that many forced converts settled into their lives as Christians, and we know of others who left for northern Africa or Italy where they returned to the outward practice of Judaism. Duran, however, remained in Perpignan, and after his conversion not only wrote in Hebrew but, in addition to other works, wrote and circulated two extraordinarily sharp anti-Christian polemics.

How could a newly baptized Jew have done this in Iberia at the end of the fourteenth century without retaliation from the Inquisition

(here, the Aragonese Papal Inquisition)? And another puzzle: ten years after his forced baptism, Duran wrote a Hebrew grammar, *Ma'aseh Efod*, that appears to be aimed at the still-Jewish community and makes almost no reference to the author's own forced conversion. Since, on the basis of these seeming mysteries, some scholars have either denied that Duran was converted at all¹² or have seen in *Ma'aseh Efod* a sign that Duran either must have fled the country to live openly as a Jew or somehow otherwise managed to "return to Judaism," a quick review here of the evidence will be useful.

Over two hundred extant manuscripts are attributed to Profayt Duran ha-Levi or the Efod. They include mathematical and astronomical commentaries, scholarly epistles, and philosophical *responsa* as well as full-fledged treatises like the Hebrew grammar *Ma'aseh Efod* and his earlier work on the Jewish calendar. They also include the two anti-Christian polemics. Taken together, they present a portrait of a well and broadly educated rationalist Jewish intellectual, a student of mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy, dedicated at the same time to the study and promotion of the Hebrew Bible and to the refutation of Christianity.

A Profayt Duran, *judeus*, also appears in numerous notarial records from Perpignan. According to the archival material, at some point between April 18, 1391, and March 20, 1392, this Profayt Duran was baptized and took the name Honoratus de Bonafide. The key document was written January 14, 1393, and records the repayment of a debt. It includes the words *magister Honorat Bonefidey phisicus olim vocatus Perfeyt Duran judeus* ("maestre Honorat Bonefidey, physician, formerly called Perfeyt Duran, Jew").¹³ The rest of the archival documents show that this Perfeyt/Profayt Duran (orthographic variations are common) remained in Perpignan for years, took part in official interactions with local notaries, such as Bernard Fabre, under his New Christian name, and presumably conducted himself in public as a Christian. From these same sources we also know that he obtained the official medical title *magister in medicina* and was appointed by the king to the royal court as an astrologer.¹⁴

Some historians have nevertheless objected that no evidence exists to prove that this Honorat/Profayt Duran is "our" Profayt Duran.¹⁵ After all, they point out, many medieval Jews bore identical names, and the extant documents are too fragmentary to exclude the existence of another such person of the same name. Support for the identification, they add, is circumstantial, relying for the most part on the lack of any evidence to the contrary.

As against this, one might adduce the dates attested in the archival documents, which are consistent with the dates of “our” Duran’s life and literary activity; the fact that several manuscripts associate the literary Profayt Duran with Perpignan, home of the “archival” Duran;¹⁶ the additional fact that the literary Duran possessed the astronomical expertise necessary to work as a royal astrologer; and so on. To all of which, the presumable retort might be: just more circumstantial evidence, still no smoking gun.

Something much closer to definitive proof has, however, recently come to light. Hebrew letters, written in Italy between 1420 and 1422 and now published, strengthen the claim that the “archival Duran” and the “literary Duran” are in fact the same man. In one of these letters, an Italian Christian named Marco Lippomano, writing to a Jew by the name of Crescas Meir, refers to certain of his correspondent’s fellow Jews who have had the wisdom to convert to Lippomano’s religion: “And see, I consider that, among the Jewish people, anyone who has been wise among them and was not wickedly stubborn has changed to our holy religion. Look at *maestre* Pablo, who is like a star in the heavens and was once called Don Solomon ha-Levi. Look at *maestre* Honorat, head of the sages, who was once called *maestre* Profayt. Look at your friend *maestre* Andrea Benedetto, once called *maestre* Solomon ha-Levi. They all were changed to the true religion and to the perfection of their souls.”¹⁷ “*Maestre* Pablo” is evidently Pablo de Santa Maria, a famous Jewish convert to Christianity, whose name had indeed been Solomon ha-Levi. “Andrea Benedetto” may have been someone familiar to Crescas Meir as a “friend.” But it is the second name mentioned—“*maestre* Profayt,” “head of the sages,” now known as “*maestre* Honorat”—that is of greatest interest. To both the sender and the recipient, this Jewish convert to Christianity, a scholar of standing, seems to have been as well known as Pablo de Santa Maria. His name had been *maestre* Profayt, and he had taken the Christian name Honorat.

Lippomano includes this *maestre* Profayt among the ranks of voluntary rather than coerced converts, leading me to suggest that he has particularly in mind the author of *Al tehi ka-avotekha*. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 8, that work, written in a mode of high sarcasm, assumes the voice of a sincere convert to Christianity who is (nominally) praising both the religion and the voluntary choice to embrace it. If, as seems likely, this text was available in Italy at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and Lippomano had read it, he well may have taken it at face value. As for the identification of the

author with Duran, the extant text of *Al tehi ka-avotekha* does not mention the name Honorat; but this piece of information may have been transmitted orally along with copies of the text or in manuscripts no longer extant.

Whether or not I am reconstructing the background to Lippomano's letter correctly, the significant fact resides in his connection of the two names. Finally we have here direct and nearly contemporaneous testimony identifying Profayt Duran the scholar with Honorat the New Christian. This in turn means that we can take the notarial documentation unearthed by the American scholar Richard Emery, and summarized above, as a reliable witness to the events of Duran's life—a life reflected differently in two different sets of sources, archival and literary. Although we may still find it difficult to accept the idea of a New Christian writing anti-Christian texts without known repercussion, it appears that such was the case. As for how Duran might have been able to manage this feat, in Chapter 1 I discuss the possibilities as I see them in the context of his overall biography.

With these diverse considerations in mind, the first part of this book places Duran within the late medieval Iberian world, beginning with a narrative of the events of his life. Much of what we know about those events derives from the registers of notaries like our Bernard Fabre, other archival documentation from Perpignan, and, later, from Navarre, Caspe, and Valencia. Beyond these relatively concrete data, less certain evidence may be gleaned from the marginalia and notes of his students, from contemporary manuscripts and their colophons, and, of course, from his own writings and correspondence.

Later, the first part explores further some of the key characteristic elements of Duran's intellectual world. Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* was fundamental to Iberian Jewish philosophical thought, and Duran's particular approach, as it appears in his youthful commentary to that book, is highly expressive of his fundamental rationalism. Here, too, through a look at unpublished autograph manuscripts by his students, this part assesses some of the different registers of Duran's teaching: practical mathematics, astronomical skills, and numerology.

Part II examines a number of stress points where scientific thought reacts to the pressure of polemical interests. It looks first at Duran's

more mature scientific work and in particular at those interests that formed a component of his Jewish identity. Turning then to four points of friction between Jewish rationalism and the “problem” of Christianity, it considers, in roughly chronological order, Duran’s essay on the number seven; his calendrical work, *Heshev ha-Efod*; his satirical letter, *Al tehi ka-avotekha*; and finally *Kelimat ha-goyim*, his historical critique of Christianity. Reading these works against the background of the Jewish-Christian polemic illuminates not only the fundamental centrality of rationalism and scientific expertise to Duran’s identity but the extent to which that polemic itself shaped the intellectual interests of the Iberian Jewish rationalist elite.

Part III addresses Duran’s reconception of Judaism under the pressures of his life as a *converso*. First it considers the 1393 eulogy in which, elevating the principle of inner “intention” above that of observance as the test of Jewish identity, Duran asserts that although the outward deeds of his fellow forced converts may be idolatrous, their hearts are pure—and that they therefore merit redemption along with the rest of the Jewish people.

Then it looks at Duran’s magnum opus, the grammatical work *Ma’aseh Efod*. There he argues that the true purpose of Judaism is to acquire knowledge of the “wisdom of the Torah,” an activity he construes literally as contact with the Hebrew Bible. In Duran’s conception, reading and intensive study of the biblical text, vocal recitation of Psalms, or even, if necessary, just gazing at and contemplating the biblical text can offer Jews a means of attracting God’s providence and of atoning for their transgressions. In order to make sense of this system, Duran locates in the words of Scripture themselves an occult virtue whose power he interprets by drawing on ideas and terminology found in contemporary magical and medical theory. The ideal for him is memorization and contemplation: in brief, although he does not say so, a way of living a Jewish life that is highly suited to the circumstances of the *converso*.

On this last point, a final introductory note. As we will see, in the eulogy written just a couple of years after his conversion, Duran defends the *conversos* on the grounds that their internal intentions are pure. A few years later, in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, he argues against Christian beliefs using coded language that is itself based on a shared

religious identity. A decade after his conversion, in *Ma'aseh Efod*, he offers a concrete system for living one's religious life internally. Similarities between Duran's postconversion mode of thinking and writing and later *converso* thinking and writing suggest that both derive from the experience of a "double life," with its radical disjuncture between external conduct and internal orientation, or between an externally constructed and an internally determined identity.¹⁸

If so, one must ask, how could this response have emerged so rapidly and so fully formed in Duran's case, within just a few years of Iberia's first and hitherto unprecedented wave of forced conversion? Could it be that the "split-identity" syndrome reflects something deeper, something fundamental to Jewish life in the urban and highly mobile world of late medieval Iberia—if not in the larger medieval world altogether?

These, at any rate, are some of the questions that hover in the background of the discussion in later pages, and to which I hope to offer answers, however partial, as we go along.

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An Intellectual Portrait

Against a decidedly mixed background of prosperity and adversity, Jews in the Crown of Aragon enjoyed a brilliant and vigorous intellectual life throughout the fourteenth century—and the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan part of the Crown was Catalonia, in particular the royal seat of Perpignan. There, Jews excelled in the practice of medicine and composed works of philosophy, literature, exegesis, and more. The Jewish “intellectual effervescence”¹ of this period was open to many different traditions and strains, with Arabic-influenced philosophical rationalism thriving alongside kabbalah and the Talmudic scholarship of northern France. Other strong elements in the elite culture of rationalist Iberian Jews were the secular sciences, especially astronomy;² in the fifteenth century, the most important astronomer in the Iberian Peninsula was the Jew Abraham Zacut (1452–1510) of Salamanca.³ Iberian and Provençal Jews were often also to be found as master clockmakers and as manufacturers and repairers of scientific instrumentation for the court. Mallorcan Jews, for their part, were involved in royal mapmaking, the most well known being the map illustrators Abraham and Jafudah Cresques.⁴

As noted in the Introduction, Profayt Duran’s own scientific activity is of interest not only for the light it can shed on Jewish identity but also for what it can tell us about the transmission of science outside the orbit of the university. It has long been thought that Iberian science was relatively “backward” by the standards of other European centers. But as recent research has shown, that is a misapprehension.⁵ Iberian universities were indeed weak in comparison with those of

northern Europe, but they were not where the practice of science primarily took place. Jews, in any event, were excluded from the universities, although they had access to Hebrew translations of some of the texts being studied there. In examining how Duran taught subjects like mathematics and astronomy, we can thus grasp how science in general might have been transmitted in a nonuniversity context in Iberia. In interpreting this material, we will also gain insight into the role of court patronage and into the practical orientation of the science promoted in the service of the Aragonese kings. Finally, in observing the multiple contexts in which scientific information was conveyed, we should also arrive at a deeper understanding of the ties that bound together the tiny circle of the Jewish intellectual elite.

In many ways, as a member of this urban Jewish elite, Duran was utterly unexceptional. His education and background were, as we will see, fairly standard for his social class. He was both a moneylender and a physician, the two most prevalent professions among the Jews of late medieval Iberia and two that were often combined. His primary scholarly interest—astronomy—was the most commonly studied scientific field among medieval Jews in general. His fundamentally rationalist and yet relatively moderate attitude toward philosophy and its late medieval Jewish avatar, Maimonides, took the middle ground in the contemporary spectrum of philosophical positions.

In another respect, too, his case was “typical,” or at least seemingly so: although (as mentioned earlier) we do not know the precise circumstances of his conversion to Christianity, we do know that in 1391—like many others—he was compelled to accept publicly a religion he rejected inwardly. And yet one fact sets Duran apart from others of his generation. Instead of quietly making his individual way in the world, he wrote works that reveal his intense inner commitment to remaining a Jew. Through those works, we have an unusual and highly illuminating opportunity to glimpse not only the compromises that might enable someone like him to live for decades as a Christian but the informed and polemically forceful theological justifications of his continued self-identification as a Jew.

To understand how he came to make the decisions he did, it helps first to rehearse what we know of his life and intellectual milieu. The next few chapters thus trace Duran’s biography, his professional life and teaching activities, and his basic philosophical orientation.

Honoratus de Bonafide, *olim vocatus* Profayt Duran, *judeus*

Born most likely in the mid- to late 1350s, Profayt Duran belonged to a relatively well-off family that had been settled in Perpignan, a city at the northernmost tip of Catalonia, for at least a generation.¹ In absolute numbers, the Perpignan Jewish community was not impressive: hearth-tax rolls indicate between one hundred and three hundred families out of a total population of approximately eighteen thousand over the course of the fourteenth century, a size far below that of the Jewish community either in Barcelona or in Narbonne in southern France.² But despite its small numbers, the Perpignan community flourished.

Under King Pere III (r. 1336–1387) and his successors Joan I (r. 1387–1396), Martí I (r. 1396–1410), and Fernando I (r. 1412–1416), Perpignan became a vigorous trading hub, its surrounding area having been transformed economically by the rising production of raw materials—wool, saffron, wheat, and oil—to meet the demands of a surging market.³ It was also a vibrant urban center, the second-largest Catalan town after Barcelona. Jews took part in its broad commercial success; among cities in Catalonia, Perpignan was one of the two main centers for the provision of credit by Jews.⁴ In addition, as it was a royal seat, court patronage ensured a subsidy for Jewish scientific and other expertise.

Aside from its commercial promise, Perpignan was strikingly cosmopolitan, serving as a fertile meeting place and way station for Jewish philosophers, astronomers, physicians, and scientific craftsmen. Not only had it been the mainland capital of the island kingdom of

Majorca from the thirteenth century until that kingdom became part of the Crown of Aragon in 1344, it was also an inland border city, set between Iberia and Provence and displaying cultural allegiances to each.⁵

Legally and administratively part of the Crown of Aragon, Perpignan had strong ties in northern Catalonia, in particular with Girona, Besalú, and Castelló d'Empuries, the three most important Jewish settlements in the neighboring province of Girona.⁶ At the same time, its Jews enjoyed close connections with the world of southern France, especially after the influx of Provençal Jews caused by the repeated French expulsions of the fourteenth century.⁷ Menaḥem ha-Meiri (1249–1315), the great leader of Perpignan Jewry in the early fourteenth century, associated his city with Provence, devoting a book to celebrating the Provençal customs of his hometown and deprecating those of the *Sefaradim* (“Iberian Jews”).⁸ Two important fourteenth-century Perpignan philosophers, Moshe Narboni (c. 1300–c. 1362) and Joseph ibn Kaspi (c. 1279–c. 1340), were of southern French extraction, with families originating in Narbonne and Argentières respectively.⁹

EDUCATION

Duran's education seems for the most part to have been characteristic of his class. To begin at the most fundamental level, his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible was both comprehensive and subtle. Not only does he cite Scripture lavishly, but he does so with wit and elegance. By the middle of his life, he was capable of composing a Hebrew grammar whose examples are all taken from the Bible.

Duran was also versed in basic rabbinic literature, which he similarly cites regularly. His literary use of this material, however, does not imply more than a superficial training in rabbinics. Indeed, if Duran's later description of an average student's Talmud study is reflective of his own experience, he would have learned merely “some rules [i.e. the thirteen exegetical principles] and . . . the ways of give-and-take with challenges and responses.” For Duran, a comprehensive mastery of the Talmud is only for those few “whom the Lord calls”;¹⁰ for the rest, Talmud study consists in using its general laws to extract hidden rulings, and even that, he notes, cannot be mastered except by attending a *yeshivah* and studying with the scholars there. Elsewhere he refers to having done this himself in his youth.¹¹

In religious philosophy, Duran knew both Jewish authors and those Muslim philosophers whose works had been translated into Hebrew and which had, in a sense, become “naturalized” into medieval Jewish philosophy. His precise use of those philosophical sources will be discussed in greater depth below.

As for languages, while Duran wrote exclusively in Hebrew, he would certainly have spoken Catalan, the local vernacular of Perpignan. He could also read Latin well enough to be able in the late 1390s to write his attack on contemporary Christianity (*Kelimat ha-goyim*) based on the Gospels and Christian scholastic writers, and even to include a critique of Jerome’s Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible. It is conceivable that he also knew some Arabic, for he makes reference to variant Arabic readings in his commentary on ibn Rushd’s *Epitome of the Almagest*—though these references could also have been taken from a second- or third-hand source.¹² If he did know some Arabic, his familiarity would most likely have been connected to his training as a physician.

For, again like many of his class and education, Duran was a physician.¹³ Through the fourteenth century in the Crown of Aragon, Jews made up close to a third of all urban physicians, of whom, in this same period at least fifty are recorded as living or practicing in Perpignan. In addition to earning a substantial livelihood, successful Jewish physicians enjoyed high social status as well as privileges that included exemption from taxes, the right to move freely at night, and the right not to wear the Jewish badge while traveling.¹⁴ In Perpignan, as in Provence, physicians seem to have formed a large part of the wealthiest stratum of the Jewish community, and were hence in possession of the necessary capital to be active in moneylending.¹⁵ Well educated, they were often the guardians and perpetuators of Jewish scientific, philosophical, and literary culture.¹⁶

Beginning in 1387, the archives refer to Duran variously as *magister*, *phisicus*, and *medicus*. In Hebrew manuscripts by copyists and contemporaries, his name likewise appears often with the title—*maestre*—of a medical professional. At some point he composed a brief, explanatory Hebrew commentary on the first book of the *Canon of Medicine* by ibn Sina (Avicenna, c. 980–1037).¹⁷ Certainly his philosophical writings disclose a broad familiarity with medical issues. For example, in *Ma’aseh Efod*, Duran uses frequent medical examples and illustrations, includes an aside on the biblical disease of *tzara’at*, and inserts medicine into his general pedagogic curriculum,

pointing to it as a science that conduces to spiritual and religious perfection and defending it vigorously against Nahmanides.¹⁸ His eulogy for Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi of Girona begins with an extended medical parable comparing the suffering Jewish people to a patient in agonizing pain, a pain that is resistant to healing both because of the faulty temperament of the patient and because of the grievousness of the wound.¹⁹

Although all of this, with the possible exception of the commentary on the *Canon of Medicine*, is certainly consistent with a medical professional, nowhere is there an indication of substantially greater knowledge than might be expected from a well-educated member of the intellectual elite. For Duran, like many others of that Jewish elite, the practice of medicine formed part of his professional identity, and its principles formed part of his education, but his writings do not reveal any deep concern for medicine as a field of inquiry or of theory. He may have belonged to the medical profession, but his scientific activity was focused beyond it, toward such topics as mathematics, the calendar, astronomy, and Hebrew grammar.

Astronomy in particular seems to have spurred his independent intellectual activity. As we will see below, over the course of his life Duran studied an impressive roster of technical astronomical works: among others, Ptolemy's *Almagest*, ibn Rushd's *Epitome of the Almagest*, Jābir ibn Aflah's *Correction of the Almagest*, al-Farghānī's *Elements of Astronomy*, Levi ben Gerson's *Astronomy* (part of his *Wars of the Lord*), and Joseph ibn Nahmias's *Light of the World*.

During his early years Duran also pursued philosophical studies, acquiring a thorough grounding in the rationalist intellectual culture of late medieval Iberian Jewry. Later in life, he reflected that he had spent too much time in philosophy as a young man: "Perhaps one will speak and object . . . that I inclined to the study of the books of the philosophers more than was proper, since apprehending it was easy, and I neglected study of the Torah, which is my life. . . . I too acknowledge that I strayed in this from the path of intellect and did not listen to the voice of my teachers."²⁰

Distinguishing among Jewish philosophical cultures in the late Middle Ages, Dov Schwartz has remarked that Iberian thinkers tended toward synthesis and interdisciplinary activity (combining philosophy, science, and kabbalah), whereas Provençal thinkers adopted "extreme and sharply defined positions."²¹ In addition, in Schwartz's view, while Iberian writers were open to their Provençal coreligionists

and freely cited them, the reverse was not true.²² In both of these respects, Duran belongs to the Iberian Jewish philosophical culture.

Duran studied the *Guide of the Perplexed* intensively, writing a now well known commentary on the book discussed in Chapter 3. From references to Rabbi Nissim of Girona (1320–c. 1380), in terms indicating that he is still alive, we may conclude that at least part of the commentary was written at some point in Duran's twenties.²³ He had not yet become a doctor but was nearly mature enough to be appointed *consiliarius* of the Perpignan *aljama* (which happened in 1381).²⁴

It is also possible that he wrote a commentary to Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, if one relies on the evidence of a few glosses in one manuscript, perhaps excerpted from a longer work. Those glosses refer to passages from the beginning of book II and, since they also allude to the *Guide*, suggest a date later than his *Guide* commentary.²⁵ Like Duran's glosses to the *Guide*, those on the *Kuzari* form a running commentary aimed primarily at clarifying vague referents and awkward syntax. Strikingly, in one of his final comments, referring to a series of passages in the *Kuzari* that deal with the Jewish calendar, Duran writes that the topic is "a hidden matter that should properly have a treatise of its own devoted to it." This helps to place the *Kuzari* glosses earlier than Duran's 1395 calendrical work *Heshev ha-Efod*. Indeed, it may have been his study of this particular passage in the *Kuzari* that led Duran to attempt a full discussion of the subject.

Of Duran's remaining two commentaries, one, very brief, is on the first book of ibn Sina's *Canon of Medicine*, and the other is on the Hebrew translation of the *Epitome* of Ptolemy's *Almagest* by ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198), a nontechnical summary of the primary textbook of medieval astronomy. The latter commentary will be discussed in Chapter 2.

It is likely that Duran's commentaries arose directly out of his own pedagogical activity. His remarks on ibn Rushd's *Epitome of the Almagest*, for example, seem to have been taken down by his students in the margins of manuscripts and later collected in more elaborate form in a single text.²⁶ Distinctive to all of Duran's commentaries, in striking contrast to his epistles and independent treatises, is that none opens with an introduction. This, too, suggests that the commentaries derive from marginal glosses and were not conceived as independent works, where, by contrast, Duran is unfailingly conscientious about introducing the subject and clarifying important premises and

definitions. Another distinguishing mark is that all are attributed to the Efod, and not (as in the case of several other works) to “Profayt Duran ha-Levi.” This again points to the likelihood that they originated as marginal glosses, which, as noted, were normally signed with an acronymic abbreviation of the glossator’s name, preceded by an *alef* for *amar* (“he said”). Stylistically, too, they are all similar: Duran’s glosses are often mere restatements, rephrasing or summarizing difficult sentences and providing cross-references to other relevant works and clarifications of vague allusions and referents.

At some point before 1382, Duran married a woman named Astrugua.²⁷ In the second half of the thirteenth century, Perpignan Jews had tended to marry at about the age of eighteen, sometimes younger; a century later, Duran may have done so as well.²⁸

Like most Jews with some wealth to exploit, Duran lent money to Christians. Starting in the 1370s, both alone and in joint ventures, he did so regularly. Over the next couple of decades, and especially in 1389, 1390, and the early part of 1391, references to him in the archival records frequently concern such transactions.²⁹ This activity, though curtailed after his conversion, continued throughout his life; as late as 1409, he is found collecting old debts through his proctor Cresques Alfaquim. Duran also appears in the archives in a variety of other economic transactions, as witness or proctor for Jews in financial matters. In his first appearance (August 11, 1372), he is held surety for Jusse Leo, the father of the physician and translator Leon Joseph of Carcassonne.³⁰

Duran’s engagement in the activities of the local Jewish communal government seems to have been minimal. As noted earlier, in 1381 he was named a *consiliarius*, a member of the council of the *aljama*, but this appears to have been a brief, one-time appointment.³¹ The council, the highest-level Jewish communal body in Aragon and Catalonia, was responsible for monitoring and guiding a multitude of religious and social functions. It was not, in the late fourteenth century, so dominated by the upper classes of Catalonian Jewish society as had been the case in previous centuries.³² Duran’s brief experience with the council may have informed his ambivalent relation toward Jewish communal leadership. A decade later, a few years after the riots of 1391, his eulogy for Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi of Girona includes sharp criticism of unnamed Jewish heads.³³

CONVERSO

One of the most significant aftereffects of the traumatic events of 1391 was the creation of a substantial population of Christians who had been baptized against their will. Yet treatment by royal and church authorities of the *converso* communities in places like Barcelona, Girona, and Perpignan seems to have been at the very least inconsistent. In many cases, members of this first generation of forced converts seem to have been simply left alone, neither socially assimilated nor taught the principles of their new faith.³⁴ Some have suggested that uncertainty within the church itself about the legal and religious validity of coerced conversion kept ecclesiastical authorities from looking too closely into the lives of forced converts.³⁵ Often, it appears, they were permitted to remain within the Jewish quarter (the *Call*), despite formal prohibitions against contact between Jews and *conversos*. In 1393, Honoratus de Bonafide is recorded as having a house outside the *Call*, on the “*platea*” of the Dominicans; the house had belonged to his grandfather.³⁶ Even though the *conversos* supposedly “formed a society apart, separated from both Jews and Christians,”³⁷ as one scholar has written, the archives offer plenty of evidence of continuing financial transactions between them and Jews as well as Christians.

Engaging in some Jewish practices in these early years may have been, in some places, relatively easy. David Nirenberg concludes that “what is most striking about the earlier period is [the church’s] relative lack of interest in the specific contents of *converso* religious practice.”³⁸ While we should allow for some rhetorical exaggeration, Shimon ben Tzemaḥ Duran (1361–1444) notes in passing that “*in the case of these persecutions*, and especially in that place [in Majorca], they let converts do whatever they want, and they are not forced to commit idolatry, and they are almost deemed to be Jews by them [Christians]”³⁹ (my emphasis).

After his conversion, Duran does not, in fact, appear to have become assimilated into the Christian community in which he continued to pursue his livelihood. On the contrary: as we see from his literary works, he remained strongly, even fiercely, committed to preserving the integrity of the Jewish community around him and to asserting his own distance from Christianity. Even the archival record, increasingly sparse as it becomes, suggests a certain level of continuing involvement with the welfare of the Jews of Perpignan.

In March 1393, we see Honoratus lending money to a Jewish widow for support of her three children.⁴⁰ Nearly ten years later, in 1402, he appears as an arbiter in a dispute between two Jews, indicating that he was still esteemed enough by members of the Jewish community to be turned to for fair judgment.⁴¹ And as late as 1409, as noted in the Introduction, Honoratus seems still to be in a business partnership with the Jew Cresques Alfaquim.⁴²

Although it has been often thought that Duran returned openly to Judaism in his later years, we have no evidence that he availed himself of this route; instead, what we have is continuous evidence of a public life as a Christian even as, in his writings—in Hebrew and presumably read only by Jews and *conversos*—he reveals an inner life as a Jew. As archival evidence attests, the man once known as Profayt Duran continued to reside and conduct business in Perpignan as a Christian. And yet during this same period, Duran also composed his two explicitly anti-Christian polemical works: *Al tehi ka-avotekha* (c. 1394/1395⁴³), the satirical letter purporting to be a message of congratulations to David Bonet Bonjorn, a recent sincere Jewish convert to Christianity, and *Kelimat ha-goyim*⁴⁴ (1397/1398⁴⁵), a historical study intended to demonstrate that church dogma is incompatible with the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels themselves.

Amid the trauma visited upon the Catalonian Jewish community in the late fourteenth century, a particularly demoralizing factor was the voluntary conversion of a number of Jewish figures who then proceeded to work actively and conspicuously on behalf of their new religion. Abner of Burgos (c. 1270–1347), who became Alfonso de Valladolid, had been an earlier prototype; among his other activities aimed at converting Jews, he carried on a polemical correspondence with Isaac Pulgar.⁴⁶ Another was Solomon ben Isaac ha-Levi, who, as Pablo de Santa Maria (c. 1351–1435), became bishop of Burgos and close adviser to Pope Benedict XIII. Joshua ha-Lorqi, who became a prominent friar named Jerónimo de Santa Fe (fl. 1400–1430), not only polemicized against the Jews but led the Christian side at the 1413–1415 Tortosa disputation.

Our knowledge of each of these cases derives in part from letters exchanged between the neophyte and one or more of his former coreligionists. These letters, written in Hebrew, were “public” documents. Alfonso’s correspondence with Isaac Pulgar (fl. first half of the fourteenth century) and Pablo de Santa Maria’s with the then-still Jewish Joshua ha-Lorqi must have been widely read and discussed.⁴⁷

Duran's *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, addressed to David Bonjorn, was itself such a public letter, and the numerous extant copies of it testify to a wide distribution.⁴⁸ Nor is it surprising that many of Duran's postconversion writings reveal a similarly acute awareness of the issues of heresy, voluntary or forced conversion, and the weakening of faith. For these loomed large in his environment and among his acquaintances, and would loom still larger after the Tortosa disputation.⁴⁹ The culmination of this process was reached in the wake of Tortosa during the preaching activities of Vicent Ferrer (1350–1419), when many more in the Jewish communities began converting to Christianity. In fact, some communities that seemed to have survived 1391 relatively unscathed collapsed at this time, including the *aljama* of Perpignan, which by 1415 was reduced to a mere handful.⁵⁰

Duran remained living in his old house, and we see him after conversion collecting old debts, an activity that supplied at least part of his income. The practice of medicine provided another part; some time before May 14, 1398, he obtained the title—available only to Christians—of *magister in medicina*.⁵¹ Both the title and his new status as a Christian would presumably have enabled him to charge more for his services than he could have done as a Jewish doctor. He now also sought further employment in an area in which he was immediately competent: the mathematics and astronomy he had studied and taught previously.

On May 1, 1392, no more than a few months after his forced baptism, the newly minted “Honoratus de Bonafide” was appointed a *familiar* of Joan I, king of Aragon, in the capacity of astrologer.⁵² Under Pere III and his successors, astrology, alchemy, and astronomy had become major interests for the royal court in Perpignan. Joan I (“el Cazador”) was known for his passion for hunting but also for his interest in astrology, numerology, and divination.⁵³ Did Duran's recent conversion now permit the king to offer this kind of patronage? Unlikely, for there is no evidence that Duran's former religious status would have been an impediment; numerous Jews were associated with the court as physicians or astrologers. But Crescas de Viviers, Joan I's chief court astrologer, had recently died, in the very riots that had affected Duran. Perhaps there was need for another astronomically competent astrologer. Duran's title of *magister in medicina* would have constituted another mark in his favor, for astrology was practiced very often for specifically medical purposes, such as determining the best times for administering medications or letting blood.

Whatever may have been the decisive factor, Duran was evidently skilled in the astronomical techniques needed to practice as an astrologer, as well as in the principles of astrology itself. While he only occasionally alludes to astrological concepts in his writing, we may presume that he was known for this proficiency in at least some court circles. In this connection, one of his students records Duran's astrologically informed clarification of an obscure comment by Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164) on the Bible. According to Duran's explanation, biblical sacrifices—which presumably mitigated the consequences of negative astrological configurations—were instituted on the new moon, the first day of the month, because it is at the time of the conjunction of the moon and the sun that “the judgments of the lower world are decreed.” Similarly, sacrifices were offered on the seventh day of the month because on that day the aspect of the moon relative to the sun is negative. In addition, Passover and Sukkot—and the sacrifices associated with those holidays—were set to begin on the fifteenth day of the month, when the sun and moon are in opposition, again a negative configuration.⁵⁴ Similar material appears in Duran's letter on the number seven (“On the Hebdomad”).

In 1395, Duran completed his first independent treatise, *Heshev ha-Efod*, a manual on the Jewish calendar. As I discuss in Chapter 7, this text, composed a mere three or so years following his conversion, shows his unabated interest in Jewish issues. The twenty-third chapter, composed in verse form, contains a unique reference to Duran's Hebrew name, Isaac ben Moses ha-Levi:

And this will be an ordinance for thee for generations until the High Priest stands at the mystery of the Urim and Tummim.

It was composed by Isaac son of Moses, a Levite; his Rock is not like [their] images.⁵⁵

It is a gift for Moses, great in works, of the house of Hasdai, Levites of the pure ones⁵⁶

Who will grow and flourish like the palm tree, in his day may the Rock gather the scattered ones,

And the rest of my acquaintances and friends and noble ones and those who listen to me, [the] companions,

May God bring them together to Mount Zion in song and verse, on the wings of eagles.⁵⁷

These lines, full of longing for the messianic age, invoke an image of the high priest restored to his place in the Temple, arrayed in his sacred garments and “standing at the mystery” of the Urim and Tummim. Duran may be relying here on the exegetical tradition that construed the biblical Urim and Tummim as some sort of astronomical instrument, perhaps an astrolabe, by which the future could be foretold, hence of particular relevance in a treatise devoted to the computation of the calendar.⁵⁸ And the Urim and Tummim were likewise closely associated with the *efod*, another of the priestly garments regarded as useful in astrological divination.⁵⁹

At the very end of this work, Duran again makes reference to the Urim and Tummim, in a similar context:

And with this, what was intended [in this book] has been completed. It will suffice for the whole time that this exile continues, until the [high] priest stands at the Urim and Tummim, and also [it will be useful] in those days, [because] in that time I think that the fixed [times] for the festivals of the Lord will continue, according to the secret of the above-mentioned intercalation, for its foundation is in the mountains of true investigation, and its reasons were explained, [reasons] that stand as [long as] the days of the sun upon the earth, and they indicate its perpetuity, like the perpetuity of the Torah, and all the more so, according to the opinion of the one who says that it is an inheritance for us from Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him.⁶⁰

Here Duran evidently associates the Urim and Tummim specifically with the restoration of the Temple service. Strongly evocative of his rationalist suppositions is the suggestion that because the Jewish calendrical rules are based on “true investigation” (presumably, astronomy), which is as enduringly true as the Torah itself, they will remain valid into the messianic age.

Finally, Duran includes in his introduction to *Ḥeshev ha-Efod* a direct reference to his pseudonym and its relation to the year of the riots: “And as for me, from the day when the Lord poured out his anger like water upon the exile of Jerusalem which is in Sefarad, this is my name forever, in the *efod* is its surrogate [*temurah*]. Therefore have I called it *Ḥeshev ha-Efod*.”⁶¹ In its biblical context (Lev. 27:10), *temurah*, “surrogate” or “substitute,” refers specifically to the exchange of one sacrificial animal for another. Duran is signaling that his personal Hebrew acronym, Efod, is also a token of his new identity, not only a way of atoning or offering up a sacrifice for an apparent desertion of the faith but an actual surrogate for the Honoratus

de Bonafide he has become in the eyes of society. It is as the Efod that Duran writes his postconversion works; he titles them according to his new identity, *The Cincture of the Efod* (*Heshev ha-Efod*) and *The Work of the Efod* (*Ma'aseh Efod*).

In the poem quoted above, Duran dedicates *Heshev ha-Efod* to an individual named Moses of the house of Hasdai, a Levi.⁶² It is possible though by no means certain that the Hasdai here refers to Hasdai Crescas. Duran does mention students of his, also “of the sons of Hasdai,” who are again labeled Levites in his introduction to *Ma'aseh Efod* (1403), but these are equally difficult to identify.⁶³

Dedicatees are not necessarily friends, or even acquaintances, but there are in fact a number of individuals whom we can associate with Duran. These are his correspondents, whom we know from the epistles addressed to them. Since they sometimes refer to each other in their letters, they constitute a kind of “circle.”

For example, Duran wrote a letter concerning an astronomical question to a Shealtiel Gracian.⁶⁴ In that letter, Duran refers to an En Meir Crescas, apparently known to both of them, who had in his hands a discussion of the quadrant about which Shealtiel Gracian had inquired. Another, unnamed student, in a manuscript recording astronomical notes, many of which derive from Duran, includes an excerpt from the technical section of Duran's letter to Shealtiel. Solomon Bonafed (1370/1380–c. 1445) of Zaragoza, a poet and avid correspondent, *circa* 1413 addresses a poem to Profayt Duran, and mentions him in a letter to their apparently mutual friend Shealtiel Gracian.⁶⁵ In 1393, Duran composed his eulogy for Rabbi Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi of Girona and sent it to the rabbi's son, Joseph; Meir Crescas transcribed a copy of this eulogy into a manuscript of his own. David Bonet Bonjorn, the son of the famous Perpignan astronomer, was the “addressee” of *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, and the astronomically inclined student mentioned above seems to have been working with a manuscript that had been copied by David Bonjorn's father, Bonet David Bonjorn (Jacob ben David Po'el, Perpignan, fl. 1361), as we will see in the following chapter.

Duran seems also to have been acquainted with the two sons of Benveniste ben Lavi (d. 1411). Introducing Duran's explication of one of Abraham ibn Ezra's riddle poems, Meir Crescas mentions the request his master received from “two golden cherubs, youngsters, from among the great ones of the land, and from its noble ones, the great sons of Benveniste.”⁶⁶ One of these sons was the poet Vidal de

la Cavalleria (otherwise known as Joseph ben Benveniste ben Lavi, or Vidal Abenlavi, d. between 1445 and 1456), also of Saragossa. He, too, was a friend of Solomon Bonafed,⁶⁷ and is known to have converted to Christianity at some point before May 22, 1414. About Joseph ben Lavi's brother, little is known beyond his name: "Juan de la Cavalleria, also called Bonafos."⁶⁸

Four acquaintances of Duran bore the name of Joseph. First is Joseph ben Lavi (Benveniste). There is, second, a student "Joseph," who composed an introductory poem to his copy of Duran's *Heshev ha-Efod*,⁶⁹ but we have no way of identifying him. Then there is Joseph, son of Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi of Girona. And fourth is the Joseph Zarch/Zarqo found in Italy using Duran's name as a passport to the good graces of Yehiel of Pisa.⁷⁰

All of these individuals make up what we know for certain of Duran's circle of students and correspondents, which was probably considerably larger.

LATER CAREER

At some point, Duran seems to have left Perpignan to work as a doctor among the wealthy and influential members of Christian society, first as a royal physician in Navarre and later returning to the Crown of Aragon. It is easy to imagine the professional and political connections with influential Aragonese that Duran might have developed after twenty years serving the royal house. His connections would have meant lucrative work as physician to notables in northern Iberia. Between 1404 and 1411 there is no record of Duran's presence in Perpignan.⁷¹ In 1406 a *maestre* Honoratus Bonafidey was summoned from Tudela, where he was living, to Pamplona to aid in treating the king of Navarre, and retained at an annual salary of 300 florins. He remained at the Navarrese court until, it seems, the second half of 1408.⁷² These moves should not on the face of it be too surprising. In general, Catalanian Jews were highly mobile and many belonged to extended families with branches in numerous cities and smaller towns.⁷³

After returning to Perpignan in 1411, probably for business reasons, Duran appears again as a medical professional with connections to centers of power. On April 22, 1412, he was a minor participant in the events of the so-called Compromise of Caspe, a town close to Saragossa and about halfway between Perpignan and the city of

Valencia. There, nine representatives, three from each of the Aragonese realms (Catalunya, Valencia, and Aragon proper), were to choose a new king. After a chaotic two-year interregnum, succession to the Crown of Aragon was finally settled, ultimately in favor of the Trastamaran Fernando I.

At some point during the proceedings, one of the Valencian representatives, Giner Rabasa, was declared incompetent due to advanced age; one of the two physicians testifying to Rabasa's mental state was *magister* Honoratus Bonafidei of Perpignan.⁷⁴ The other was *magister* Jerónimo of Alcanyís (*magistrum Geronimum, ville Alcanicü*), whom we should identify as the former Jew Joshua ha-Lorqi, mentioned above. Joshua ha-Lorqi was a native of Alcanyís, he was a doctor, and as noted he adopted the name Jerónimo de Santa Fe upon his conversion to Christianity.⁷⁵ It is even thought that ha-Lorqi's conversion to Christianity took place in 1412 in the town of Alcanyís itself, approximately eighteen miles from Caspe, and under the sponsorship of none other than the preacher and anti-Jewish agitator Vicent Ferrer.⁷⁶ Indeed, Ferrer was the second representative from Valencia, and a partisan of Fernando. At this point in April 1412, ha-Lorqi's conversion would have been quite recent, and it would have been natural for him to have accompanied Vicent Ferre to Caspe.

It seems almost too much to contemplate these two famous converts working together on a medical case, consulting each other's professional opinion and presumably making some sort of conversation while in each other's company. One of them, whatever his state of mind at that point in 1412, had spent years being internally loyal to Judaism; the other had just completed his voluntary and evidently sincere conversion to Christianity. Did the two *conversos* find themselves on opposite sides in an argument over Judaism and Christianity? Or did Honoratus have to pretend to agree with Jerónimo with regard to the "errors of the Jews"? Tantalizingly, it was evidently around this very year that Jerónimo decided to encourage Pope Benedict XIII to hold a public debate—what was to become the infamous Tortosa disputation. Did something about the encounter between these two prompt Jerónimo's decision? It is of course impossible to say.

After Caspe, Duran may have continued on to Valencia, where a *magister in medicina* Honoratus de Bona Fe registered his will (no longer extant) on May 26, 1427. Presumably he had remarried; a wife Saura was named as his sole heiress. Honoratus de Bona Fe died in Valencia January 20, 1433.⁷⁷ He would have been in his late seventies.

One wonders why Duran left Perpignan, first for an apparent absence of almost seven years and then, after returning in 1411, for Caspe and finally Valencia. A number of possibilities present themselves. His connection with the Aragonese court may have been affected by adverse developments there, possibly related to his position as astrologer. Presumably, he and his abilities had been viewed with favor by Joan I when he was appointed *familiar* of the court in 1392. Precisely because this position was that of astrologer-physician, however, Duran's place may have been jeopardized after Joan died in 1396. Joan's brother and successor Martí I had a far less enthusiastic attitude toward astrology; in 1398/9, the court poet Bernat Metge (1346–1413) wrote *Lo Somni*, an attack on Joan and his astrological and magical interests.⁷⁸ Still, Martí did not make an aggressive attempt to purge the court of astrologers and their books, and, as far as we know, Duran remained in Perpignan, in one capacity or another, until his first prolonged absence starting in 1404.

In any case, astrology may not have been the real issue at all. In 1413, after the two-year interregnum, the new Aragonese king Fernando I began his rule, and his attitude toward Jews and *conversos* did not bode well for those among the latter who harbored lingering Jewish sympathies. Perhaps, then, his election was one of the factors driving the newly returned Duran away from the royal seat.⁷⁹ Fernando supported both Vicent Ferrer and Jerónimo de Santa Fé; the latter was both the king's physician and, as noted, the guiding force in the Tortosa disputation (January 1413–December 1414): an event that followed quickly on the Compromise of Caspe. The atmosphere in courtly circles may have become perilous.

As for the destination of Valencia, if that identification is correct, Duran's move there is somewhat puzzling. One might have expected an attempt to flee to Italy, where he might return to practicing Judaism openly now that his life in Perpignan was ending. Evidently, however, his purpose in leaving Perpignan was not to live openly as a Jew. He appears in the Valencia archives as Honoratus, and thus presumably was still living outwardly as a Christian in his new city. Could the choice of Valencia be connected to a decision to remain living the life of a *converso*? Valencia had a relatively vigorous *converso* community that, despite inquisitorial activity, seems to have survived and was aided in its Judaizing, as Mark Meyerson has documented, by the neighboring Jewish community of Morvedre, the largest in the kingdom of Valencia.⁸⁰ If one were to seek out a community in which

it might be possible to live as an actively Judaizing *converso*, among a large group of other converts from 1391, Valencia could have been the place.

And yet his decision to leave Perpignan and to end his life in Valencia may have been less complicated than I have portrayed it. When Duran traveled earlier to Tudela and Pamplona, or for that matter to Caspe, he seems to have been pursuing opportunities related to his medical profession. So here, too, once again, professional and pragmatic interests could have been at the back of his movements.

HOW DID HE DO IT?

Scholars have repeatedly wondered how, as a New Christian, Honoratus de Bonafide could have written works in Hebrew, let alone anti-Christian polemics, without retaliation by the Inquisition. While there is no way to know for certain, it is possible to speculate about the circumstances that may have made this possible.

One consideration is that intense danger to Judaizers from inquisitors had not yet fully crystallized. The official Spanish Inquisition, notoriously active against backsliding *conversos* in Seville, did not begin to function in Castile until 1481. In Catalonia, it was established only in 1483 and in the Crown of Aragon a year later. What was active earlier in Aragon was the Papal Inquisition, which, having begun as an ecclesiastical response to the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Cathar heresies, traditionally dealt with issues other than Judaizing.

This is not to say that it altogether refrained from investigating relapsed *conversos*. In 1346, a backsliding convert had been burned at the stake by the Roussillon office of the Aragonese Papal Inquisition. That regional office sat in Perpignan, presumably in the Dominican monastery: that is, just across the street from the house that appears to have belonged to Profayt Duran.⁸¹ One of the most famous inquisitors general, the Dominican preacher Nicholas Eymeric (c. 1320–1399), is known to have personally prosecuted Jews or former Jews, though in the case of one of them, the former Jew and Dominican friar Ramon de Tarrega, the charge was not Judaizing but philosophical heresy.⁸²

Before 1391, efforts had been made to shield *conversos* both from Jews and from Old Christians.⁸³ There is even evidence of recourse *against* the Inquisition: in a document from 1356, Pere III pardons a Jew of Perpignan for heresy even though he had been convicted

“both by us and by the inquisitor.”⁸⁴ Indeed, through much of the fourteenth century, Jews who had converted in France would flee to Aragon, there to take up their lives as Jews once again.⁸⁵ Even into the beginning of the fifteenth century, Jews in the Crown of Aragon were to some extent protected by the king as a valuable asset. Anxious to retain control over their tax revenue, the king attempted to keep legal cases involving Jews and former Jews within the royal, secular court system and out of the hands of the Inquisition.⁸⁶

But this was before 1391, when the absolute number of *conversos* was quite small and there was no *converso* problem per se. As mentioned earlier, David Nirenberg has argued that between 1391 and about 1415, Christian authorities were not particularly concerned about Judaizing on the part of converts; this only became an issue around 1430. What they were worried about was preventing *conversos* from fleeing the country, and making sure that the still-remaining Jews were segregated from Christians.⁸⁷ Again, this is not to say that relapsing *conversos* were never prosecuted, only that it happened less than one might imagine given the number of unwilling new converts. And perhaps it was precisely those numbers that made vigilant oversight of their religiosity impractical.

By the first quarter of the fifteenth century, however, the Papal Inquisition in Aragon was actively engaged in pursuing backsliding *conversos*; King Martí I, then at the end of his life, censured the inquisitors for “ransacking *converso* homes on questionable grounds.”⁸⁸ But by this point, Duran had ceased composing works in Hebrew, and was to all appearances settled into the peripatetic life of a royal physician.

True, this was a world in which any literate individual among the now numerous *conversos* could presumably have informed the Christian authorities of Duran’s activities. But such a scenario presumes that the Hebrew works by Duran circulated among people who knew them to be written by a New Christian. As for *Ḥeshev ha-Efod* and *Ma’aseh ha-Efod*, on the surface they were perfectly innocuous: treatises on the calendar and on grammar unlikely to prompt inquisitorial investigation. Those Jews (and *conversos*) who might have read them might well have had little awareness of their problematic aspects. Not only that, but they were written under a pseudonym (Efod) and *apparently* by a Jew, despite the veiled allusion to conversion at the end of the introduction of *Ḥeshev ha-Efod*. Presumably, there would be a problem only if the Efod were widely known to be identical with Honoratus de Bonafide.

The real concern in any case would have been the two polemical texts. In the case of *Kelimat ha-goyim*, none of the extant manuscripts are signed. We now think that the work is Duran's mainly because, in discussing the Eucharist, the author notes in passing: "as I wrote in a letter," an apparent reference to *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, where he does in fact discuss the Eucharist, and in similar terms. In addition, two poems—one a dedication and one a conclusion—appear in some of the manuscripts.⁸⁹ The very last line of the concluding poem, "God will command His mercy, to renew His world, and bind upon him His garment, to be priest at the Urim,"⁹⁰ conceals the word *Efod* in a play of words very much like that employed by such contemporary poets as Vidal Benveniste who for one reason or another wove their names into their verse.⁹¹

In fact, there is little reason to think that *Kelimat ha-goyim* was widely known to be by Duran at the time, or even that it was widely circulated; as noted below in Chapter 9, there are only three extant manuscripts from the fifteenth century, and none is written in a Sephardic hand. Several manuscripts bear superscriptions attributing the work to him, but most of these are very late, primarily seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁹² Evidence from contemporaries is scanty and tends rather to suggest that the manuscripts circulated anonymously. Shem Tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut of Tudela, in two copies of his *Even bohan*, the earliest of which was completed in 1405,⁹³ seems to know the work, and even to have used it as a prototype for his twelfth chapter, borrowing Duran's arguments as well as his quotations from Nicholas de Lyra and Peter of Lombardy.⁹⁴ However, Shem Tov does not mention the name of the author, either out of discretion or because he simply does not know it: "I saw the treatise of a great and wise author [which] disputes with the Christians about the roots of their faith and makes known to them . . . that their faith has neither root nor essence, even from the foundations of their faith—which are the Gospels and the [writings of] the Apostles—and I saw of the author [there was none] like him and in his image and in his similitude and I depended on him for some of the passages he adduced from the books of the Christians."⁹⁵ The Castilian Joseph ibn Shem Tov (d. 1480) identifies the author of *Sefer ha-kelimah* (which he describes in such a way as to make it certain he means the book known to us as *Kelimat ha-goyim*) with the author of *Al tehi ka-avotekha*. But he, too, refrains from explicitly giving a name.⁹⁶

As for *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, it is signed with Duran's preconversion name, Profayt Duran ha-Levi, and indeed Emery thought that Duran had "passed it off as having been written before his conversion."⁹⁷ As I will suggest below, it is also possible that Duran meant to protect himself by writing the work in a mode of high sarcasm, making his true meaning difficult to decipher. But again, it is not at all clear that Honoratus de Bonafide was known to be writing as a Jew, let alone that he was identical with the Efod. While at least some members of Duran's own circle seem to have been aware of the conversion and knew that Duran authored works in Hebrew after it, their written references to this fact are strikingly allusive.

Take, for example, a prefatory poem composed for *Ma'aseh Efod* and found in two manuscripts, one of which is in a fifteenth-century Sephardic hand.⁹⁸ The poem was written by one Isaac Cabrit, very possibly a younger contemporary of Duran's by that name who lived in Perpignan around 1409–1414, translated a medical work from Latin, and later converted to Christianity in 1418, becoming Ludovicus de Ripisaltes.⁹⁹ Most of the poem is devoted to praise of the grammatical content of the work but it refers to Duran as one "called by the name of Levi, this scholar who changed his worship."¹⁰⁰ These words suggest that the author of the work, the Efod, was known by the poet to have been a convert. If this Isaac Cabrit was the physician who lived in Perpignan at the same time as Duran, he would certainly have known him as Isaac ben Moses ha-Levi and known, too, that he had been forced into Christianity.

Another example: around the time of the Tortosa disputation, Solomon Bonafed addressed yearning verses to *maestre* Profayt, *ba'al ha-Efod* ("days have passed and I have not seen him"), calling on him to rise to the defense of Judaism in its time of crisis.¹⁰¹ In the first half of this lengthy poem, Bonafed addresses the Efod exclusively; but in the second half he cites other figures like the sons of Lavi ("the princes and masters of song"), who are distant from him,¹⁰² and laments the loss of Hasdai Crescas.¹⁰³ In this poem, too, there seem to be some allusive references to Duran's double life:

Lamp of the generation, encircled by a crown of cloud (Ps. 97:2),
source of understanding, whose robes Time bears (Song 5:7).

Perfect in knowledge, his thought no one knows (Job 37:16) but his
heart, and it is not revealed to his servants.

Upon the tablet of his books are the secrets of his faith even if they do not comport with his deeds.

His words stir up the dead and how goodly it is (Is. 14:9) for a man to believe what he has written with his hands.

In his *efod* are prophecies, not sorceries, and in his mysteries no image or *terafim* (Hos. 3:4).¹⁰⁴

According to Bonafed here, Duran's true beliefs are not known to those "servants" around him, though they do appear accurately and faithfully in his writings: it is *there* that his "perfect" thoughts are to be found and the secret of his faith revealed. But there is the hint here, too, of a religious problem; Bonafed seems to be defending Duran from accusations of idolatry ("no image or *terafim*"). These lines, brief and "poetic" as they are, may be taken to suggest that Bonafed was to some extent aware that Duran was unable to express his thoughts except in his books, under a pseudonym.

Around the same time, in 1413, a young man named Joseph Zarqo arrived in Pisa, a town on the northeastern coast of Italy, a short boat ride from Nice but easily reachable as well from any port on the Provençal or Catalanian shore of the Mediterranean. Looking for shelter and support, Zarqo wrote a letter, including a number of laudatory poems, to the local patriarch, Yehiel ben Metatia. He recommended himself to Yehiel in particular on the strength of his having been a student of the Efod, who, he averred, used to speak "day in and day out" in praise of Yehiel. He describes Duran thus: "The prince, the captain, a cunning workman (Is. 40:20) whom no secret troubles (Dan. 4:6), a bundle of the myrrh of learning and wisdom in all visions (Dan. 1:17) and riddles, crown and testimony (2 Kings 11:12) to the law and to its witness (Is. 8:20), my teacher and master, the Efod."¹⁰⁵ Immediately noticeable here is the pointed double reference to the book of Daniel, not the most common element in the standard lexicon of literary allusions. But it suits. Daniel is known primarily for his iconic resistance to the blandishments of the local pagan religion while in the service of the Chaldean king. Zarqo emphasizes the reason Daniel was taken into the king's palace—namely, his exceptional learning and his ability to interpret visions. By means of this rhetorical identification, the Efod emerges from Zarqo's description as distinguished in two principal ways: first, he was a master of arcane scientific knowledge; second, despite living in a gentile world, he was not defiled by it. Quite to the contrary, the Efod was a crown and support to the Torah. If I am

not reading too much into these allusions, it would seem that Zarqo, too, was aware of Duran's problematic situation.

In addition, the letters from Italy in 1420 and 1422, mentioned in the Introduction, demonstrate that Duran's forced apostasy was known as far away as that country. It is significant that the Christian writer Marco Lippomano holds up the conversion of *maestre* Profayt/*maestre* Honorat as on a par with that of Solomon ha-Levi/Pablo de Santa Maria, suggesting that both individuals were known to the Christians as sincere converts. On the other hand, his Jewish correspondent, in his reply, seems to believe (or chooses to claim) that *both* conversions were, to the contrary, forced and insincere.

There is yet one more, unfortunately undated, trace of Duran as unwilling convert. An anonymous two-line Hebrew "joke" appears jotted down in a manuscript near the glosses on Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* attributed to the Efodi. It goes like this: "One asked the Efodi, 'Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel [Is. 63:2]?' And he answered, 'Why has the son of Jesse not come [1 Sam. 20:27]?'"¹⁰⁶ The imagined exchange, conducted by means of two direct biblical quotations, turns on a traditional medieval pun. The word *adom*, in the scriptural context meaning "red," alludes to Edom, the biblical nation that, beginning in the medieval period, was understood to be Christendom. The real question thus is: why do you bear the outward appearance of a Christian? The answer, put into the mouth of Duran, is taken from Saul's query to Jonathan: Where is David ("the son of Jesse")? By genealogical association, David stands in for the messiah, and so Duran's response amounts to the retort "Because the messiah has not yet come!"

This humorous (and slightly bitter) couplet expresses some of our own bewilderment with Duran's choice. It also suggests one particular view of why *conversos* might have remained living as Christians: namely, they had despaired of the promised messianic redemption. Had God in fact rejected the Jewish people and chosen the Christian community? And yet at the same time, the joke also presumes that the *conversos'* Christianity was not a true change of belief but rather a foreign garment that might be cast off when the right moment arrived.

I would thus argue that Duran's activities were not widely known. His more innocuous-seeming writings were made possible by his use of the pseudonym Efod, his dangerous polemical works by their anonymous circulation. We must also recognize that Duran was writing as a New Christian for barely a decade, and these were the chaotic

years directly following the upheaval of 1391. It was not yet clear, perhaps, whether this group of New Christians, so obviously converted under absolute physical compulsion, might not be officially permitted to return to Judaism. The poems by contemporaries convey their appreciation of Duran's difficulties in subtle allusions and biblical references, seeming to believe that these hints in ornate Hebrew verse were safe enough. In turn, the fact that Duran's last dated work was in 1403, and that as far as we know he lived another thirty years without writing more, may suggest a recognition that it was no longer possible to continue. Perhaps he despaired of his self-imposed task; perhaps he was warned by friends in high places to desist; perhaps attention was beginning to be paid in the wrong places.

* * *

Having traced Duran's biography to its end, I next turn to his scientific pedagogy and then explore his intellectual background through the lens of his youthful commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and his philosophical *responsa*. In these works, Duran reveals an orientation reflective of many of the trends in fourteenth-century Iberian Jewish thought, and especially the rationalism that shaped its worldview.

Scientific Transmission Outside the University

As was the case in general for the Iberian Jewish elite, Duran's education included basic scientific knowledge. But scientific activity, in particular astronomy, was also unusually central to Duran's thought and made up a large proportion of his writings. He taught mathematics and astronomy at a practical level, studied more advanced texts, and corresponded on astronomical and numerological issues with his peers.

Histories of early modern science in the Iberian Peninsula depict a rich legacy of empirical, experimental, and practical activity.¹ The imperatives of Spanish and Portuguese overseas commerce and empire building encouraged such fields as cartography and navigational instrumentation.² Redrawing the map of the world, Iberians made extraordinary progress in the utilitarian and commercial sciences of "metallurgy, medicine, agriculture, surgery, meteorology, cosmography, cartography, navigation, military technology, and urban engineering."³

The achievements of sixteenth-century Spain, while spurred by the discoveries of the New World, did not emerge from a vacuum. As early as the end of the thirteenth century, with the colonization of the Balearic Islands, an extensive maritime trade began to be carried out by Catalan merchants in networks centered in Barcelona and Perpignan, reaching beyond the Balearics to southern Italy and Sicily. One result of this political and economic expansion and its consequent technical needs was that by the end of the fourteenth century, the Kingdom of Aragon-Catalonia had become a center of scientific activity, and by

the fifteenth century Spain and Portugal were the most technically developed countries in Western Europe.⁴ This progress continued until the seventeenth century, when Spanish scholars would choose to rework medieval philosophy and science rather than to replace them with the new theoretical systems of the scientific revolution.

In the creation of late-medieval Iberian science, the royal court, however peripatetic in reality, was a primary source of patronage.⁵ For in contrast to the rest of Europe, scientific production in Iberia from the first quarter of the fourteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth century seems to have taken place primarily outside the universities.⁶ In Aragon-Catalonia, for example, Pere III “The Ceremonious” (r. 1335–1387), seeming consciously to model his court on the glorious thirteenth-century Castilian court of Alfonso X (1221–1284),⁷ commissioned scientific works and astronomical tables as well as scientific and philosophical translations. Pere’s son, Joan I “The Hunter” (r. 1387–1396), followed in his father’s footsteps while also favoring astrology and other divinatory arts in his court.⁸ Under his patronage and even under that of his somewhat less enthusiastic brother Martí (r. 1396–1410), mathematics, medicine, astrology, and astronomy flourished in Perpignan as well as in Barcelona, the commercial center of Aragon. Royal patronage by the fourteenth-century kings of Aragon led in turn to the employment of Jewish translators, instrument makers, physicians, cartographers, astrologers, and scientific craftsmen, laying the foundations for the important role Jews and *conversos* would play in Iberian science of that and following centuries.⁹

If the role of the court was conspicuous in the production of Jewish science in late medieval and early modern Iberia, the role of the city was no less so. Scientific writings in this period emerged nearly exclusively from urban centers that had attained a certain level of economic and commercial importance. In the sixteenth century, for example, most scientific texts were produced in Seville, the main port and commercial gateway for ships traveling to and from the New World. Madrid, the second most vibrant center of scientific publications at the end of the century, achieved this status precisely because Felipe II (1527–1598) made it his new capital. The urban nature of early modern Iberian science is expressed also in the social position of its practitioners, who (apart from some nobility and members of the clergy) came primarily from the urban literate strata of artisans, merchants, craftsmen, and scribes. Significantly, the overwhelming

majority of scientific writings, whether or not in the field of medicine, were the work of physicians.¹⁰

Each of these factors helps explain the striking presence of Jews in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century science. The last factor is especially noteworthy, for the Jews were an almost completely urban group; indeed, Jews made up a disproportionate fraction of literate urban society. Moreover, from the early fourteenth century through the fifteenth, Jews were especially well represented in the medical profession. A third of the doctors appearing in the archives of Barcelona were Jews, though the Jewish population in that city made up no more than 5 percent of the total. The proportions were similar in the city of Valencia. In Huesca, a far smaller town where Jews comprised 10–15 percent of the population, more than half the doctors were Jews; in the years 1310 and 1311, they all were. The fifteenth century was no different.¹¹

Patterns of scientific activity are shaped by a wide array of considerations, including the nature of scientific patronage, how society is structured, what communication networks are used to spread scientific knowledge, which institutions of learning are available, and the prevailing religious culture and its attitude to scientific investigation. Using Duran as an illustrative example, I will consider how the social milieu and intellectual and religious culture of the late medieval Iberian Jewish elite conditioned their scientific endeavors, and how, in particular, Duran's scientific practice may have been shaped by and have itself shaped his Jewish identity.

First, a caveat: medieval science is not modern science. Not even in theory does it rest on the examination of a problem, the formulation of a falsifiable hypothesis, or the conceiving and carrying out of an accurate and isolated experiment that will either confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis. The word "scientist" itself is an artifact of the nineteenth century. Two modern terms often favored by historians of medieval science, are "philosopher-scientist" and "natural philosopher" (as in one who examines the natural world using the tools of philosophy).

Both of these terms suggest a particular approach to the study of the natural world that may misrepresent some of the motivations of Jewish astronomers, astrologers, physicians, and even mathematicians. Thus, while it may be appropriate to term the Christian scholastic Nicole Oresme a natural philosopher, it is more difficult to apply the same term to the Jew Hasdai Crescas, whose investigations

of motion and critique of Aristotelian physics were not aimed in the least at learning about the natural world but rather at countering the radical philosophical tendencies he believed were undermining Jewish faith in his time. In addition, the more technological and number-reckoning sides of science, such as those involved in constructing astrolabes and quadrants and making and using astronomical tables and ephemerides, or, for that matter, professional engagement in medicine or astrological prognostication, are also excluded by the designations “philosopher-scientist” and “natural philosopher.”

Here I will instead employ the words science and scientific activity with the understanding that, depending on the context, they may indicate vastly differing levels and registers of work and study. Where possible, in order to avoid the strong associations of the word “scientist” with modern ideas of science, I will use more specific terms like astronomer, instrument maker, astrologer, physician, and so on.

The Duran-related texts examined below are by individuals whom we can place in a particular world and culture. They include letters copied and preserved outside their original context, scientific texts with marginal notations, a collection of writings by Duran put together by one of his students, and a rare example of class notes jotted down by another student. The texts are closely tied to their time and place, a part of material culture containing the physical trace of human hands as well as of a human mind.

MS PARIS BNF HÉB 1023

Our first source is a manuscript that contains approximately thirty folios of notes taken down by a student of Duran.¹² Preceded by two astronomical works—a commentary on the ninth-century *Elements of Astronomy* by al-Farghānī (*Kitāb fi-l-ḥarakāt al-samāwīya wa-jawāmiʿ ʿilm al-nujūm*, a nonmathematical summary of Ptolemaic astronomy translated into Hebrew by Jacob Anatoli) and an abridgment of that same work—and followed by a selection in Hebrew translation of treatises by well-known Arabic philosophers, the notes record brief mathematical techniques: how to multiply spherical fractions, how to find a square root, and so forth, often illustrated with diagrams or examples. There are also numerous comments on how to use astronomical tables or observational instruments. Marginal notes in the student’s hand are also found on the first item in this manuscript, the commentary on al-Farghānī.

The student who recorded these notes seems to have been working from other texts, sometimes extracting passages from them. When extracts are presented, a heading notes the source and sometimes indicates whether the manuscript is in the author's or another's hand. For example, an anonymous commentary on the twelfth-century work on planetary astronomy by the Barcelona astronomer and astrologer Abraham bar Hiyya (*Heshbon mahalakhot ha-kokhavim* ["Calculation of the Paths of the Planets"])¹³ is said to come from a book of Duran's "in the handwriting of someone else,"¹⁴ suggesting that the student is extracting the glosses from a manuscript Duran himself had copied (or perhaps just purchased), and that the marginal comments are in someone else's handwriting. Again, comments on what look to be Gersonides' astronomical tables are said to be from a book of Bonet Bonjorn, written with "his [own] fingers."¹⁵ Some of these constitute very brief snippets from works like Ptolemy's *Almagest*, while others are longer extracts from, for example, a letter by Duran himself on the true and median conjunctions.

It is not possible to say whether these jottings were the work of days or weeks or years. The hand is the same throughout, but with sufficient deviations in ink, pen, and speed to make it clear that the notes were not copied formally and sequentially from a preexisting text but added as the material came to hand. The diagrams tend for the most part to be fitted into the text, with the words flowing around them. What we seem to be seeing is the progress of a student's learning. While there are no explicit references to other students, sometimes the writer varies the first person singular—"a question that I asked"—with the first and third person plural—"we wanted to find" or "the doubt that they raised with him"—suggesting that he was not working alone.

Evidence from the University of Paris shows that medical students in that highly institutionalized setting took notes in a wide variety of formats, one of which was loose sheets, sometimes two to three folios kept as flyleaves in manuscripts; that is likely what we are seeing here as well.¹⁶ They also took notes in the margins of their texts, again seen here. What we do not find in this manuscript, however, are the sorts of study aids that Paris medical students added to their textbooks: titles given in running heads, marks for chapters and subdivisions, quick reference signs, or schematic diagrams of a work's contents for help in memorization.

Traces of face-to-face encounters do appear in these pages, as when the student reports that "I heard [it] from the Efod" or "from the

mouth of the Efod” or “as the Efod taught me about the doubt which I asked him” or “this too I heard from him.”¹⁷ Sometimes a source is only cryptically indicated, as in the case of an otherwise unidentified *maestre* Bonjudas¹⁸ who has provided mathematical techniques to find the square of a number that is a multiple of one hundred, the square of a number that is between one and one hundred, and a rule regarding the ratio of a number to its square.¹⁹

The same Bonjudas is also the source of two separate groups of brief astronomical answers. One covers the following subjects: why we see the moon as full one or two days before it is actually full; why we don’t see it at all at the time of the conjunction; a question about the term for the ecliptic; and why up to four hours can elapse between the true and the median conjunction.²⁰ The student has appended to these passages an extract from the letter Duran wrote to Shealtiel Gracian on just this topic of the difference between the true and median conjunctions. *Maestre* Bonjudas himself is cited with no comment beyond his name, suggesting perhaps that he was so well known to our student that no more need be said; perhaps he, too, was part of the study group. Later comments are headed by even less easily identifiable acronyms.²¹

In this particular class, Duran was instructing students on such matters as the multiplication of spherical fractions; checking work by “casting out nines”; using astronomical tables and their canons for calculating the position of the sun and moon; taking account of error in observations using an astrolabe, a quadrant, or a *saphea*; gelosia (lattice) multiplication; and other highly practical astronomical techniques.²² Given what we know about the practical needs of astrologer-astronomers, it is thus likely that the students were acquiring the skills necessary to practice astrology either as an independent activity or, presumably, as a supplement to medicine. The material is highly pragmatic in purpose, and indeed reflects a relatively “low” register of scientific activity. All the more fascinating, then, since this level of activity and learning does not usually leave traces in the written record.

Although the language of the notes is Hebrew, there is no other overt sign of the Jewishness of either teacher or pupils. Only once does a “religious” reference appear, when the note taker mentions giving thanks to “the Creator of the universe,” and even there he is quoting from his source.²³ Names of Jewish astronomers and mathematicians are given in their Catalan form next to citations of Ptolemy and al-Battani, and much of the extracted scientific material appears

without reference to the nature or background of its source. This is Jewish science, then, only in the banal sense that it is being done by Jews. And yet the fact that they write their mathematics in Hebrew rather than in the vernacular of their everyday lives should not be dismissed. In itself it constitutes a sign, unspoken and perhaps even to some extent unconscious, of Jewish identity.

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A second source is a collection of Profayt Duran's writings put together by another student, in this case one whose name we know: Meir Crescas.²⁴ Crescas's interests seem to have pointed him to material quite different from that just discussed: specifically, the numerological legacy of Abraham ibn Ezra. The compilation includes an eight-line poem by ibn Ezra built around the first ten numbers; according to Crescas, the poem was customarily recited in Barcelona at the afternoon service of Yom Kippur. It is accompanied by Duran's explanation of the poem's meaning, an explanation said here to have been written at the request of the two sons of Benveniste (ben Lavi). Crescas follows this with letters by Duran sent in response to two queries: one about the mystical and numerical qualities of the number seven (discussed in detail in Chapter 6 below) and the other, which I touch on in Chapter 4, about prophecy, prompted by a confusing phrase in the magical text *Sefer ha-Tamar* ("Book of the Date-Palm"). Another riddle poem by Abraham ibn Ezra, this time about the metaphysical significance of the Hebrew letters appearing in the divine names, is likewise explicated by Duran. There are also two explanations of opaque comments by ibn Ezra on passages in the Pentateuch and an additional comment, not by Duran, again relating to the significance of the number seven in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, there appears Duran's lengthy eulogy for Abraham ben Isaac of Girona, dated to the end of 1393.

Meir Crescas's notes differ in style from the informal, hurried, and economical notes of our first, anonymous student. In this case, he has made a clear attempt at uniformity and legibility, possibly so that others might ultimately read what he has written. It is also conceivable that he copied the material within a relatively contained period of time, perhaps from an earlier notebook collection. Nevertheless, these notes, too, represent the record of a study group.

Crescas writes: "Said the scribe [that is, Meir Crescas himself]: I did not think it proper to copy more from his explanation of this

section from the notebook of one of the companions, as we hear the words of the sage [only] sometimes and rarely. And this [passage] indeed, with difficulty and with great labor [is still] ambiguous, since in what remains I am not certain it agrees with the opinion of the sage and it was not clear to me that it comes from his mouth. And I shall pass to what I have attained from him regarding the section ‘Speak to the priests’ [Lev. 22:26–23:44], along with the rest of the faithful companions.”²⁵

These lines, like the class notes of our first student, evoke a scene of several adult disciples studying together, sometimes with and sometimes without their master, each perhaps with a notebook that may be shared with other members of the group. Something similar may have taken place among the circle of students led by the Provençal astronomer and philosopher Levi ben Gerson in the mid-fourteenth century, whose “school” has been described by Ruth Glasner.²⁶ They too termed their master *moreinu* or *hakham*, and they too appear to have considered themselves a group of companions (*haverim*), with Levi ben Gerson himself referred to as *he-ari she-ba-havurah*, “the lion in the company.”²⁷ The main difference is that here Profayt Duran does appear to have attended the class in person on at least some occasions, while there the students gathered as a group but without the teacher’s presence. Another example may be that of Abraham Rimoch who explains in the introduction to his commentary on Psalms that he has “settled down with [his] few disciples who have stayed with [him].”²⁸

In these student groups we might be glimpsing a model for the “circles” of scholars whose importance in the development of philosophical thought in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries has been stressed by Dov Schwartz.²⁹ The existence of such study circles and groups of individuals separated in space but in contact on topics of mutual interest illustrates how scattered members of the Jewish elites—a very small subset of an already small and marginal group—could and did maintain a sense of cultural identity and cohesion.

As for when this manuscript might have been written, Crescas refers consistently to Duran as *maestre* Profayt Duran ha-Levi or *maestre* Profayt ha-Levi, that is, by his preconversion name. Still, it is in the 1393 eulogy, the last text of the set copied here, that Duran announces his new Hebrew name as “Efod.” The manuscript was clearly completed after that year, and thus at minimum a year or two after Duran’s conversion. Moreover, at the end of the explanation just mentioned, Meir writes that “this is what was transmitted to us of this

explanation in secrecy and hiding.”³⁰ It sounds very much as though Duran were communicating with his students while at the same time living as a Christian. Did they meet clandestinely? Did Duran write out his explanations of ibn Ezra and pass them secretly to one of his students? Striking, too, is the fact that Duran’s students do not seem to have been particularly disturbed by the fact of his baptism. That he was concurrently pretending to be a Christian (and attending mass?) did not apparently disqualify him from providing teachings on biblical interpretation; it only seems to have made their meetings more difficult and so less frequent.

As I have mentioned, Meir Crescas also chose to add one passage not by Duran. To all appearances Crescas’s own, it is a further comment on the appearances of the number seven in the Bible and in particular two aspects of that number that he has found in Duran’s epistle on the hebdomad. The first is that seven represents rest in this harsh world, like the holiday of Shemini Atzeret on the seventh day of Sukkot; Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the seventh month; the *shemittah* year, which takes place every seventh year; and the Jubilee year, occurring once every forty-nine (seven times seven) years. His second point is that the square of seven is forty-nine, which represents a cycle of return. Then he offers his own opinions, gleaned from “books and his own mind.” First: seven represents the creation of the world. Second: since man is a social creature, he must devote six days to maintenance of the body, the house, or the city. The Sabbath, on the other hand, is one day set aside from the week to contemplate metaphysics and to cleave to the separate intellect. Meir Crescas would thus seem to share Duran’s philosophical rationalism, a rationalism that thinks of the Sabbath as inculcating belief in God’s creation of the world (through its association with the number seven), and the Sabbath as a time for metaphysical study.

Who were these students of Duran? Although it was common enough for parents who could afford the expense to hire tutors for their young children, it seems plain that Duran’s disciples were long past that age. Meir Crescas himself was no child: in the opening to his essay on the number seven, Duran twice addresses him as *gevir*, “master,” and treats him in terms of respect and flattery that one can hardly imagine a teacher employing toward a youngster (unless, perhaps, he were of a truly exalted station in life).

Aside from study circles and personal correspondence, another method of transmitting scientific knowledge was via the learned

epistle. These, like the letters Duran sent to Meir Crescas, were evidently circulated among interested parties and copied into notebooks or manuscripts.³¹ One example is Duran's *Hilluf ha-yamim ve-haleilot* ("The Variation of the Days and the Nights"), a brief treatment of the equation of time—that is, variations in the length of the day according to the time of year and the latitude. The text explains why and how the true solar day varies over the course of the year, and why it is necessary to define a mean solar day for astronomical measurements. Another is his letter to Shealtiel Gracian on the differences between the true and the median conjunction, which, just like the question about the equation of time, explains why astronomy, for its own computational purposes, defines the "mean" behavior of the celestial motion and how this mean relates to the actual, true motion of the earth and planets.

In both these epistles, Duran displays his understanding of the geometrical models used in medieval astronomy. Both topics may have been related to understanding the workings of astronomical tables, which could include tables for the equation of time as well as tables of eclipses (which, when they take place, do so either at conjunction or opposition). The tables of Jacob Bonjorn, for example, astronomer to Pere III, specified for an observer in Perpignan the true conjunctions and oppositions of the sun and moon for the years 1361 through 1391, including the date and time for each conjunction (and opposition), a correction for finding the time of the true conjunction in previous or later cycles, and the true positions of the sun and moon at the time of the conjunction.³²

Current scholarship has argued that in general the imprint of the court as a locus of scientific activity was less important in early modern Spain than it was in Renaissance Italy, Spanish science being more strongly shaped by the needs of a specifically maritime empire.³³ In the case of the Jews, however, the court seems to have been the primary factor. Although the flourishing of an important family of Jewish cartographers in fourteenth-century Majorca would seem to offer a prime example of Jewish science shaped by the needs of a maritime kingdom, the Jews in question, as Gabriel Llompart and Jaume Riera have shown, were not cartographers but rather illuminators of maps of the world and nautical charts.³⁴ In this particular case, many of

their maps (and elaborately painted compass cases) seem to have been produced as courtly gifts or fashionable luxuries rather than as practical charts used for actual navigation.

Of course, that the Aragonese kingdom drew much of its wealth and prestige from maritime trade and exploration was clearly a factor in the courtly interest in such maps and charts. But in the case of late medieval Iberian Jews, the role of the court in shaping scientific activity seems to have been more direct. Jewish astronomers, physicians, astrologers, instrument makers, clockmakers, and more were all employed by the Iberian monarchs, and royal interest in their skills was precisely what enabled their scientific activity. Jacob Bonjorn, though we know relatively little about him other than his astronomical tables, seems himself to have been a beneficiary of such royal patronage at the Aragonese court in Perpignan.

Joan I's court was particularly open to the occult and to astrological divination. Profayt Duran's appointment as astrologer reflects that openness. The skills needed for the practice of astrology—namely, knowledge of the principles of astronomy, the use of observational instruments, and the reading of astronomical tables—are precisely what some of Duran's students were interested in.³⁵ In the medieval Islamic world, too, scientific work was done for “rulers whose primary interests lay in the practical benefits promised by the practitioners of medicine and astronomy and astrology and applied mathematics.”³⁶ Reflected very clearly in the class notes discussed above are both the technical nature of the science being imparted and the pragmatic nature of what appear to be the students' scientific ambitions, as well as the fact that they were engaged in using and understanding astronomical tables. Duran's teaching activities in these documents are thus emblematic of the kind of extrauniversity transmission of knowledge, court patronage, and utilitarian focus that seems to have characterized Iberian science (both Jewish and non-Jewish) at this period. Yet as we will see in Chapter 5, Duran's scientific correspondence with peers also reflects a nonpragmatic preoccupation—for example, with the relation between the mathematical models of the heavens and sensible reality—that seems to stem from more theoretical and possibly theological concerns. In fact, Duran engaged in scientific activity at many levels, reflecting the interplay of social and economic factors with theological rationalizations and issues of Jewish identity.

One commonly recognized characteristic of the sciences in the Iberian Peninsula is their continued reliance on Arabic astronomy well

into the sixteenth century, a conservatism usually attributed to the area's geographical proximity to North Africa and to what has been called "indelible Arabic cultural influences."³⁷ In the case of Duran, it is important to point out that Catalonia had no history of Muslim domination, or significant Muslim population. Still, the same conservative impulse has also been associated with Jewish and *converso* prominence in these fields, since, wherever in Iberia they lived, Jews were presumably the custodians of Arabic science. Indeed, recent quantitative studies confirm a decided preference among Jewish scholars for Arabic over Latin sources when it came to translating philosophical and scientific texts into Hebrew, a preference holding steady in Iberia up to the fifteenth century, when there appears a flurry of Hebrew translations of Latin philosophical texts.³⁸

On this point, what Duran and his students were studying is entirely congruent with the common perception. Apart from the obvious Ptolemy, their sources can be categorized as primarily ninth- through twelfth-century Arabic writers: al-Farghānī, al-Farabi, ibn Sina, ibn Aflah, and ibn Rushd. These basic texts were supplemented by two twelfth-century Iberian Jewish astronomers, Abraham bar Hiyya and Abraham ibn Ezra. Finally, their contemporary (fourteenth-century) sources were also Jews: Levi ben Gerson and Jacob ben David Bonjorn. There is little sign of any knowledge of or interest in current Latin astronomy.

A single exception to the rule lies in a commentary by Duran on a short treatise on asymptotes called *On Two Lines*, which was probably translated into Hebrew from Arabic at the beginning of the fourteenth century.³⁹ Duran's commentary exists in two manuscripts, and has itself been shown to rely heavily on a Latin paraphrase of the Latin version of *On Two Lines*.⁴⁰ That Duran's scientific writings do not quote Latin astronomers thus does not mean he was not reading Latin scientific works, but it does suggest that in his view, as far as contemporary astronomy was concerned, the finest work was being done by Jews: Gersonides and Jacob Bonjorn in particular.

In passing I must note that Duran's interest in the question of asymptotes seems to have arisen from his study of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*; there Maimonides mentions the concept of two lines that approach each other infinitely closely, but never actually touch, as being in the category of things that are ungraspable but true.⁴¹ Duran explicates this point in *Guide* I.73 in a passage that has been shown to be taken nearly exactly from a text attributed to Jacob

Bonjorn and found in one manuscript of his *Astronomical Tables*.⁴² The passage has been described as “confused,” and Duran may have thought that he needed further explication of the question, spurring him to read the treatise *On Two Lines* and assimilate the material of the Latin paraphrase.

To recapitulate briefly: from the traces of the scientific activity of Duran and his students left in their notebooks and letters, manuscripts and marginalia, we have learned a certain amount about the methods of scientific teaching and study undertaken in Jewish communities outside the university setting. These students shared material from books and notebooks. They studied manuscripts together and recorded the comments of their teacher in the margins. Sometimes the glosses might be incorporated into and become part of the transmitted text, or sometimes the students might shape their informal marginal glosses into a formal commentary, copied independently of the text. In many cases, students paid careful attention to and noted down the reliability of their sources of information. Our exploration of the scientific activity of these groups of Jews illustrates not the production of new knowledge or new texts but another aspect of Jewish scientific activity: the transmission and consumption of known science.

In John E. Murdoch’s view, “the predominant social factor effecting intellectual development and change in the Middle Ages [was] the university.”⁴³ While Jewish scholarship was not entirely divorced from university learning, a very different dynamic was at work in determining the direction of its scientific and philosophical investigation. Murdoch has also argued for what he calls “the unitary character of late medieval learning,” by which he means that theological issues were closely linked to the questions pursued in natural philosophy; in the institutional setting of the university, the various schools were in conversation with each other.⁴⁴ As for the Iberian Jewish intellectual elite, its members were neither attached to a university nor entirely independent from each other. By means of the communication networks of scholarly epistles and the circulation of manuscripts, they were able to engage in issues of common interest. The settings where Jewish knowledge transmission took place were flexible and varied, ranging from study groups that could mix correspondence and personal encounter to exchanges of formal essay-like letters among groups of peers who shared questions and concerns. These networks of communication share some characteristics with the circulation of

rabbinic *responsa*, exchanged by figures who typically knew each other, often by means of designated couriers. In certain respects, the two may indeed be considered parallel phenomena.⁴⁵

Transmission of information among Jews was thus largely ad hoc, responding to the interests and needs of individuals rather than to a set curriculum. What spurred these interests could vary from a practical need for valued technical skills to the intellectual need for careful exploration of lines of scientific or mathematical research, in this case often suggested by Maimonides. Indeed, for Duran and his circle, and for the Iberian Jewish rationalist elite as a whole, I would suggest that Maimonides' *Guide* served as a base text, shaping the interests and motivations of Jewish scholars in a manner parallel to the way in which the Christian university curriculum shaped the interests and motivations of Christian scholars. Just as within the university context theological concerns could impress themselves on the study of natural philosophy, so too the intensive study of Maimonides tended to filter science through the lens of the master's theological considerations.⁴⁶

As we will see, this is also very much true of Jewish philosophy as a whole.

Efodi

The Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed

In the seventeenth century, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo (1591–1655) reported in a letter that while in Egypt he had seen something like eighteen commentaries on the *Guide*, long and short. He classified four of them by reference to the four sons of the Passover haggadah. One was by “Efodi,” a variation of the name Efod that was used to refer to Duran beginning sometime in the fifteenth century. Delmedigo’s evaluation of Duran as the son “who does not ask” sounds at first negative. But in fact Delmedigo is not pleased with radical commentators, like Moses Narboni, who inquire too deeply into Maimonides’ secret positions and reveal them indiscriminately. For him, it would seem, the best commentator is one who explains the plain meaning of the text. He goes on: “Efodi, who is an honorable man, answers the unstated question [lit. answers the mute: *meshiv heresh*] and, like Rashi, does not ask, [and he does so] briefly and clearly; he is the principal commentator [on the *Guide*] and he belongs in the category of mathematicians and astronomers.”¹ In this description, Delmedigo has put his finger on two real characteristics of Duran’s commentary: first, his responsiveness to difficulties in the text and the central fact that many of his glosses are primarily aimed at clarification; second, the salience of Duran’s mathematical and astronomical interests.

The quality of “not asking,” which Delmedigo sees as similar to Rashi, is that Duran may respond to a problem in the text but he will not tell you explicitly what that problem is. For each comment, one might well ask: “what is bothering Efodi?” Sometimes the problem is merely one of Tibbonide awkwardness; Duran simply restates a

difficult sentence in clearer syntactical form. For example, the *Guide* opens with these words (in Pines's translation from the Arabic) to Joseph, the work's addressee: "When you came to me, having conceived the intention of journeying from the country farthest away in order to read texts under my guidance. . . ."² In the Hebrew translation by Samuel ibn Tibbon (c. 1150–c. 1230), the text on which Duran bases his commentary, it comes out something like this: "Behold from then you came to me, and you intended from the ends of the earth to read before me. . . ."³ Duran glosses as follows: "*from then you came to me*: he means from an earlier time, when it was your intention to come before me; *and you intended*: he explains, before you came to me, your intention was to come."⁴ Here it is not a question of points of doctrine; it is merely a matter of clarifying the sometimes turgid, sometimes knotty style of the Hebrew translation.

Of course, there is more to Duran's commentary than clarification. While he does not seem to come to the text with a fully thought out system of his own, he does make numerous substantive comments reflecting his interpretive lens. He does not hesitate in general to add information, usually in a neutral ("not asking") voice, explaining (or enlarging on) what he thinks Maimonides truly meant to say.

As for the astronomical and mathematical interests, it is likely Delmedigo knew Duran's scientific writings apart from the commentary on the *Guide*. The astronomical knowledge to be found in the commentary is of no more than minor significance, and would hardly warrant designating the author an astronomer. And while the commentary does indeed include a couple of mathematical notes of varying length, with one exception they too amount to little more than clarifications. For example, Maimonides mentions someone who does not know "the measure of the cone of a cylinder." Duran comments: "he means, [when you have a] cylinder that is equal in all of its sides to the diameter of the base of the cone, and the measure of the height of the cylinder is equal to the height of the cone, this ignoramus is ignorant of what the [ratio] is of the cone [to] the perfect cylinder."⁵

The exception is a comment on two asymptotic lines, mentioned in Chapter 2.⁶ Maimonides, in *Guide* I.73, cites lines that approach each other infinitely closely but never touch as something incomprehensible to the mind, but still true. Duran's lengthy explanation, as noted, seems to be taken from a text attributed to Jacob Bonjorn. Delmedigo claims that "[Efodi's] wisdom can be recognized from [his] explanation of the 'two lines' that [Maimonides] mentions,"⁷ and it is

possible that he saw this to be sufficient evidence to rank him “among the mathematicians.”

When Duran read the *Guide* and added his glosses, he drew heavily on his Perpignan predecessors Joseph ibn Kaspi⁸ and Moses Narboni. Maurice Hayoun has traced entire phrases to Narboni’s commentary, particularly in the portrayal of the prophet as one who draws down the divine providence on the people.⁹ Duran also cites the translator-scholar Samuel ibn Tibbon.¹⁰ All three men belonged to the tradition of “radical” Maimonideanism.¹¹ In the *Guide*, Maimonides discusses such problematic theological issues as creation, divine will, miracles, divine providence, prophecy, and human perfection, and can often be found contrasting the “Jewish” position on these questions with the “philosophical.” For a “radical” commentator, Maimonides was in these cases concealing his real intentions and opinions, which should be seen not as congruent with the Jewish position but instead as close to or identical with those of philosophy, that is, Aristotle.¹² By contrast, a camp of “moderate” philosophers generally interpreted Maimonides according to his so-called exoteric position, following more closely the “normative” Jewish theological line. An example: in *Guide* II.15, Maimonides asserts that Aristotle did not demonstratively prove the world’s eternity, and therefore a rational Jew may choose to adhere to the traditional Jewish belief that the universe was divinely created *ex nihilo*. Whereas a “radical,” despite this clear statement, might attribute to Maimonides himself a hidden belief in the eternity of the world, a “moderate” would take him at his word, as Duran does.

Profayt Duran certainly accepted the premise that Maimonides wrote the *Guide* at two different rhetorical levels: an exoteric and an esoteric. Pointing to part of the *Guide*’s complicated paratextual apparatus, Duran explicates the three brief biblical verses inserted by Maimonides between the Epistle Dedicatory and the Introduction to the First Part (Ps. 143:8; Prov. 8:4; Prov. 22:17) in a running commentary that exposes his understanding of Maimonides’ purposes:

Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, whether I should walk in the way of Torah alone or in the way of Philosophy alone, for my desire is unto You.

Unto you, o men—the sages—I call, to study this book, for you will receive benefits from each chapter. Indeed the voice of my

teaching will come to *the sons of men* without wisdom, for even they will receive benefit from some of the chapters of this treatise.

Incline thy ear and hear the words of the wise: he means, the knowledge of the early sages. *And apply thy heart to my knowledge:* your study of this book will be in order to know my knowledge and my intention.¹³

According to Duran's reading, the first verse lays out (at least rhetorically) the dilemma of the book in terms of a stark dichotomy between reason and revelation. The *Guide* supposedly offers two opposing paths to God: either Torah or philosophy. The second verse shows Maimonides implicitly dividing his readers into two categories—"men" (identified as sages) and "sons of men" (the ignorant). That is to say, Maimonides is speaking to two different audiences. Both can reap advantages; presumably, the masses will benefit from a superficial reading of some of the chapters, while sages will benefit from a deep reading of all. Finally, Duran reads the last verse as describing the two kinds of material to be studied in the *Guide*: ancient rabbinic knowledge plus Maimonides' own opinions. Careful study of the *Guide* will thus reveal two kinds of secrets: those of the early sages and those of Maimonides himself.

All of this would tend to suggest that Duran was himself a radical Maimonidean; indeed, in many cases, Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) would lump Duran and Narboni together as outrageously radical rationalist interpreters of Maimonides. In some cases this is certainly true. For example, on the question of whether Maimonides meant to hint that the Revelation at Mount Sinai was a parable of the kinds of mental and physical preparations needed for intellectual apprehension, Duran is fully in line with Narboni's interpretation and then offers his own impressively detailed reading of the scriptural passage.¹⁴ Still, Abravanel is overstating the case.

For "radicals" and "moderates" alike, less problematic was the implicit Maimonidean approach toward scriptural exegesis. To the degree that the creation story in Genesis, for example, can be said to contain hints and allusions that, properly interpreted, teach true knowledge about the structure, substance, and formation of the created world, then, according to Maimonides, one can undertake its exegesis by means of the intellect, armed with "the demonstrative sciences and knowledge of the secrets of the prophets."¹⁵ In practice, this meant Aristotelian physics and metaphysics.¹⁶

Thus, in treating Maimonides' scientific exegesis, Duran's method is to clarify the master's seemingly deliberate obfuscation; this may

be why Abravanel viewed Duran as a radical, where Delmedigo can see him merely as an explicator. Another way of putting it is that Duran lends the reader a helping hand with the scientific explication of biblical passages on which Maimonides himself waxes particularly obscure. Regarding the scientific content of *Ma'aseh merkavah* (Account of the Chariot) and *Ma'aseh bereshit* (Account of the Beginning), in particular, Duran is hardly to be distinguished from the most rational interpreters of the *Guide*, assimilating “foreign science” into his comprehensive definition of Jewish knowledge and placing the resulting *mélange* at the service of biblical exegesis.

One of Maimonides’ obscure pronouncements, for example, concerns the making of the firmament and the dividing of the waters. It cannot be understood without the aid of information that Maimonides has very carefully dispersed throughout the rest of the chapter. Duran’s gloss pointedly draws together the full picture:

Maimonides (in the Hebrew): Afterwards, it was divided into three forms: a part of it was seas; a part of it was firmament; a part of it was above that firmament, and all was outside the earth.¹⁷

Duran: He means that the waters that were under the firmament were one thing and the waters that were above the firmament were a second thing and the firmament itself was a third thing, and each and every one was separate in its form. And the waters that were under the firmament were the kinds of waters that are *in actu*, existing among us, and the waters above the firmament are the vapor that goes upward from the coldest place of the air and from them the dew is generated and they are “waters” *in potentia*. And the firmament itself is the cold and moist place of the air where the vapors ascend, and there the dew is generated. When [the rabbis] said “the middle section was congealed,” they meant the cold part of the air where the dew is generated.¹⁸

Later glosses by Duran in this chapter reveal a similar understanding of the creation story as, in effect, a scientific allegory.¹⁹ For example, the figures of Adam and Eve represent form and matter.²⁰ Duran can thus explain, on behalf of Maimonides, that the two separate accounts in Genesis of the creation of Adam and Eve are to be understood as two complementary ways of understanding the nature of man: he is unified, in that he is a whole creature, but he is also composite, because he is made up of both form and matter.²¹ And the temptation of Eve by the snake is a symbolic account of the dangerous power exercised over our intellectual life by the imaginative faculty of the soul.²²

As for the “Account of the Chariot,” said by Maimonides to be “divine science” or metaphysics, Duran explicates Maimonides’ description of the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of four creatures (Ez. 1:5–25) in terms of the celestial order and divine governance of the world.²³ To summarize Duran’s glosses on this section of the *Guide*: The four “living creatures” represent the four celestial spheres: the sphere of the fixed stars, the sphere of the five planets, the sphere of the sun, and the sphere of the moon.²⁴ Their four faces are the four sublunar elements, moved by the four celestial spheres, such that each sphere is particular to an element. Each sphere is made to correspond with a “form,” namely, the mineral, vegetable, animal, or human (rational). These forms are impressed on sublunar matter by the celestial intellects. The four wings are equated with the four causes of the motion of the spheres, and the two hands attached to each represent the two faculties, one of generation and one of preservation, emanated from each orb to the generated things. Even though these two faculties come from the orbs, it is the separate intellects that emanate the forms of generation and preservation, while the forces that prepare sublunar beings for the reception of these forms come from the celestial bodies. Each orb is one simple body. The orbs never cease moving, nor do they speed up or slow down. Each orb has its own particular motion, due to the individual separate intellect that moves it. There is no empty space between the orbs, which are luminous because of the stars in them. The “body” under the living creatures is “first matter,” clothed by the four elemental forms. The “form of the four wheels” is the corporeal form.²⁵

The “metaphysics” here is concerned with the divine forces that govern the earth by means of the celestial motions and the emanation of the elemental and corporeal forms. Much of it can be found already in *Guide* I.72 and II.10. Duran himself notes in a gloss on II.10, much of which is taken up with a description of the heavenly bodies and their earthly influences: “the secret is that all that [Maimonides] is saying now is introduction and notes for his explanation of the Account of the Chariot of Ezekiel.”²⁶ As Gad Freudenthal has argued, “[w]hereas in his early writings Maimonides had repeatedly identified [the Account of the Chariot] with the most sublime metaphysics, according to the interpretation just considered, the point of Ezekiel’s Chariot visions was merely the universally accepted and quite banal idea of governance of the sublunar world by the heavenly bodies.”²⁷ But while, not too surprisingly, Duran is at ease in

revealing these banal “secrets” of the Torah—that is, Maimonides’ philosophical and scientific interpretation of the scriptural text—he is slightly less comfortable attributing the problematic philosophical opinions suggested by radical commentators to Maimonides himself. In some cases, he does report the opinions of his radical predecessors without comment of his own, but in other cases he seems to try to moderate their claims.²⁸ An instance of the latter is the issue, mentioned earlier, of whether Maimonides believes in the eternity of the world.

The question comes up in Duran’s treatment of the “seventh type” of internal contradiction—the one that, according to Maimonides, is employed by an author bent on concealing “very obscure matters” from the masses. In some cases, writes Maimonides, such an author will “conceal some parts” and “disclose others”; in others, he will conduct his discussion in one place “on the basis of a certain premise” and elsewhere will “proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting the first one.”²⁹ A putative example of such a contradiction occurs in two passages, *Guide* I.9 and *Guide* II.26. It is, for Duran, the prime example of the seventh type of contradiction; he adduces it in his gloss on Maimonides’ definition of this kind of contradiction. As Duran explains: “Out of necessity the author of the book needs to posit one premise for the sake of the masses and in another place he will posit another premise, contradicting the first, for the individual and understanding philosophers. And this hints at the explanation of the verse: ‘Thou, O Lord, sittest for all eternity, Thy throne is from generation to generation’ (Lam. 5:19), since in the chapter ‘Throne’ (I.9), he explains that it is the attribute of His grandeur and greatness, and in *Pirquei de R. Eliezer*, he posited that it is a description of the heavens. And the first of them is for the masses and this hints at the understanding of his words.”³⁰ In other words, in *Guide* I.9, Maimonides notes that in some verses the term “throne,” as in “throne of glory,” means the heavens; just as a terrestrial throne indicates the grandeur of the human king who sits on it, the heavens too indicate the grandeur of the King. Then, pointing to two biblical verses where the word “throne” cannot, in context, have the meaning of “heaven,” Maimonides asserts that there is a “wider” meaning to the word, namely, the attribute of “greatness and sublimity.”³¹ One of those two verses is Lam. 5:19: “For it states explicitly: ‘Thou, O Lord, sittest for all eternity, Thy throne is from generation to generation’ (Lam. 5:19), whereby it indicates that it is a thing not separate from Him. Hence

the term throne signifies in this passage. . . . His sublimity and greatness that do not constitute a thing existing outside His essence.”³² As Duran glosses, “the verse has revealed that the throne of God may He be blessed is not separate from Him. . . . [I]t indicates that it means His grandeur and greatness.”³³ If the Lord and his throne “are not separate,” “throne” here must be nothing other than an inseparable attribute of God, namely, his greatness.

However, in *Guide* II.26, in discussing the phrase “throne of glory” as it appears in *Pirquei de R. Eliezer*, Maimonides reasons that the term “throne” must refer to a created body, for any other reading would create “a great incongruity.”³⁴ Then Maimonides adds: “the throne’s eternity *a parte post* [existing infinitely into the future] is expressly stated: ‘Thou, O Lord, sittest for all eternity, Thy throne is from generation to generation.’ Now if Rabbi Eliezer believed in the eternity *a parte ante* [having existed infinitely in the past] of the throne, the latter must have been an attribute of God and not a created body.”³⁵ As Duran glosses there: “he means to say, that indeed the orb of Aravot [the outermost sphere] that was created from nothing is eternal in the future; this is explained from scripture (Lam. 5:19).”³⁶ As Duran sees it, Maimonides’ interpretation of the verse here is his true opinion, as opposed to that expressed in I.9, “for the masses.”

In his “esoteric” commentary on the *Guide*, Joseph ibn Kaspi gives a “radical” reading of the two incompatible interpretations. In *Guide* I.9, he says, “if ‘Thy throne’ had hinted at the heavenly body, such that Scripture equated the everlastingness of this body with His everlastingness, it would have taught [the] eternity [of the universe] according to the opinion of Aristotle, and [Maimonides] rejects this [teaching] here.”³⁷ Since, as far as ibn Kaspi is concerned, Maimonides does hold (secretly) that the word “throne” refers to the celestial orb, and therefore teaches that the orb is eternal just like God, the seventh cause is duly invoked to explain the seeming contradiction.³⁸

But Duran, because he does not think that Maimonides believes in the eternity *a parte ante* of the world, accepts that there is a contradiction but draws the sting from it: “Perhaps he meant that it is possible that the heavens will be destroyed according to the Torah given to us in truth, and that the everlastingness of the world is not necessitated; [but] in chapter II.26 [Maimonides] explains this verse about the world’s being everlasting; it contradicts the explanation he makes here. And the solution to this is that he is behaving according to the seventh cause, and here he had to contradict.”³⁹ Duran’s

suggestion—that the hidden doctrine here is the everlastingness, not the eternity, of the universe—means that the “secret” turns out to be thoroughly anodyne.⁴⁰

What is particularly interesting, at least for the purposes of this discussion, is that Duran cites, though sparingly, both *The Wars of the Lord* and the *Commentary on Job* of Gersonides (1288–1344), who was a “critical admirer”⁴¹ of Maimonides. This suggests that he had either studied Gersonides before approaching the *Guide*, was reading the two authors together, or would simply turn to *The Wars of the Lord* at appropriate points (perhaps guided by a teacher, or by another commentary).

Duran refers to Gersonides on key questions of epistemology, divine knowledge of particulars, and divine providence.⁴² On astronomical issues, there is no clear evidence that Duran had yet read and absorbed the highly technical astronomical sections of *The Wars of the Lord*. Still Duran does cite Gersonides twice in his comments on *Guide* II.24, where Maimonides discusses the problem of contradictions between Aristotelian physics and Ptolemaic mathematical astronomy (to which we will return at greater length in Chapter 5). Maimonides asserts that a “true perplexity” is the fact that the mathematical models of Ptolemy, which employ epicycles and eccentric orbs, come into conflict with the physics of Aristotle, which states that celestial matter is constrained to move in perfect circles of constant motion about a fixed point, namely, the center of the earth.⁴³ This particular issue is picked up on by Duran:

Maimonides: If epicycles exist, theirs would be a circular motion that would not revolve about an immobile thing.

Duran: He means that it has already been explained in natural science that all that moves must move with respect to an immobile thing, and this epicycle, if we posit that it exists, would move with respect to the sphere which is something not immobile. And the solution to this doubt is not difficult, for the premise made there, that everything that moves does so with respect to an immobile thing does not mean that that which moves does so with respect to a body that is primarily immobile, but it means to explain that it is not possible for there not to be an immobile body with respect to which it revolves, [even if] it moves with respect to a thou-

sand moving bodies one after the other, so that all of them require that it be immobile. And the proof of this is that a man moves with respect to a boat and it moves, indeed, because the waters are immobile. It has already been verified that the man moves upon an immobile thing and that is the water. And thus explained *ha-rav* R. Levi of blessed memory: even though the epicycle moves with respect to the sphere, and it moves, since the larger [sphere] moves around something fixed [namely, the center of the earth], therefore the epicycle moves with respect to an immobile thing.⁴⁴

Duran here seems to be defending, to some extent, the practice of mathematical astronomy against Maimonides' view that one of its central features, epicycles, is fundamentally at odds with the principles of Aristotelian motion. In doing so, he is drawing on Gersonides' exceptionally thorough discussion of the objections to epicycles in his *Wars of the Lord*.⁴⁵ Another objection to Ptolemaic astronomical systems adduced by Maimonides in this same chapter concerns the issue of how the epicycles can move in reality without transferring their motion to the spheres they touch—if, as assumed, there is no vacuum in space. Again in *Wars of the Lord*, Gersonides posits a substance—a fluid left over from creation—that he calls “the body that does not keep its shape,” and in his gloss Duran invokes this celestial matter, in Gersonides' name, as another answer to Maimonides.⁴⁶

In *Guide* II.24, Maimonides seems to note with some resignation that the most we can know about the heavens is “a tiny part of what is mathematical.” Duran, however, might interpret Maimonides' assertion as said not resignedly but optimistically; we may not be able to know the essence and nature of the celestial realms, because we cannot touch them or experience them directly, but we can construct mathematical models of them that tell us something about their Creator, and we can speculate about them with our intellects in a constructive way.

Scholars today are divided on the issue of Maimonides' view of the knowability of the celestial realms and its ultimate consequences for our ability to know the divine,⁴⁷ but Duran does not hesitate to attribute to Maimonides the “skeptical” view that the separate intellects are beyond human apprehension, even for Moses. When Maimonides in *Guide* I.54 asserts that Moses “grasped the existence of all [God's] world with a true and firmly established understanding,” Duran interprets this to mean that “Moses our master did not apprehend perfectly the separate intellects; even the agent intellect he did not apprehend perfectly, for it is permitted to corporeal beings only

to apprehend the existence of His world, that is to say, the corporeal [world]; to apprehend the essence of the matter of the celestial sphere is something that is not within the power of any sage or philosopher.”⁴⁸

With respect to knowledge of the sublunar world, Duran’s comments seem to bring Maimonides closer to Gersonides. As Duran formulates the point, with some caveats, “If you wish to apprehend that He is the principle of all existent things, persevere and contemplate and intelligize all existents. Then you will know demonstratively that the Lord is the principle of all existents and you will apprehend Him as much as you are able to apprehend, for knowledge of His essence is impossible. Therefore, whoever wishes to apprehend Him, as much as can be apprehended, let him apprehend and intelligize all the particulars of existents. And according to what he intelligizes of the particulars of the existent things, he will intelligize Him, for all existents are stamped by Him, with a spiritual, formal stamp.”⁴⁹ As the potter leaves the marks of his fingers in the clay, God has left his stamp in every detail of his creation. By examining these details, the forms of the world, one can learn something about the Maker. By apprehending the “spiritual, formal stamp” of the world, one can, to some limited extent, apprehend God. In this, Duran may be reflecting the position of Gersonides, who held that man can come to know natural laws through his sensory experience. While God knows these laws a priori, natural laws produce the individual events from which man can then deduce the laws.⁵⁰ And those laws can tell us something about God.

But what about the laws expressed by the divine governance of the earth by means of the celestial realm? Can they tell us anything about God? Maimonides calls on the reader to consider the enormous size of the universe (“this great and terrifying distance”),⁵¹ arguing that the remoteness of the orb of the fixed stars is indicative of the still greater remoteness of God. If we are at so great a distance from the body of the highest part of the orb of Saturn that “its substance and most of its actions are hidden from us,” how much more can this be said of God, “Who is not a body”?⁵² In his gloss, however, Duran asserts: “*Its substance is hidden from us*: he means that the substances [essences] of the spheres cannot be apprehended through the senses, only through the intellect. *Most of its actions [are hidden from us]*: i.e. apprehension of the actions of the heavenly bodies in this lower world, most of them are hidden from us. *How much more can this be said of God*: He means that [if] apprehension of the actions of the heavenly bodies is hidden from us, all the more so is

it proper [to say] that the apprehension of the actions of their agent, which is not a body, and [apprehension] of Him, may He be blessed, are hidden.”⁵³

Duran allows that while we may not be able to apprehend the orb of Saturn with our material senses, we *can* apprehend its existence, and some of its actions, with our intellect. I understand him to mean that Saturn is so far away we can barely see it, and its motion is so slow as to be hardly detectable. We certainly cannot “see” its celestial sphere. But its existence can be apprehended with the intellect through observation of the phenomena—in particular, I would suggest, by constructing mathematical models for its motion. As for Saturn’s “actions,” it would appear that Duran is interpreting Maimonides’ words as referring not to the planet’s motions but to its influence on the lower world. What we have here is a causal chain: God “moves” the intellects, the intellects “move” the spheres and their planets, and the planets “move” the terrestrial elements. Maimonides would then be saying (in Duran’s interpretation) that since we do not fully understand the workings of the influences of the planets on this earth, how much less can we understand the workings of their causes, or of the First Cause; but from what we do observe, we can use our intellects to construct arguments about their existence. It is, however, precisely the workings of the influences of the planets on the earth that is the “esoteric” subject of the Account of the Chariot described above.

To repeat, it appears that, for Duran, the heavens are distant but not unreachable through the exercise of our minds. Indeed, as we will see in Chapter 5, Duran believed that the study of the celestial orbs, at least by means of astronomy, was worth much time and effort.

If the commentary on the *Guide* was written, as it seems, when Duran was relatively quite young, it is possible he was still working out his own philosophical approach. Duran’s exceptional sensitivity not only to issues of doctrine but to infelicities of expression in the Hebrew and clunky and unclear syntax may well suggest that his glosses emerged out of a pedagogical engagement with the text. But whether he was responding to student difficulties or to his own perceptive examination of the textual confusions, or even both, is hard to say. It is striking that in this work he does not refer to Judah Halevi at all, suggesting, as I argued in Chapter 1, that he had not

yet encountered the *Kuzari*, a book that seems to have made a deep impression on his later writing.

But it also seems Duran had read at least some key parts (if not all) of Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord* first. If so, it might explain his conviction that Maimonides believed that the world was created, for Gersonides took a far more positive view toward this issue, arguing against Maimonides that it was not only true, but indeed a provable proposition. To Gersonides, there was one philosophical theory that fit with both philosophy and Judaism, namely, creation out of preexistent matter. This matter, which Duran adduced in his comments on *Guide* II.24, was without form, neither in motion nor at rest. Similarly, for Gersonides, the universe has no end, even if it had a beginning—perhaps another reason why Duran attempted to read this as Maimonides' "secret position." As we saw, Duran's defense of Ptolemaic astronomy against Maimonides is easily traceable to Gersonides as well, and in general Duran's apparent epistemological optimism may also have its source there. In this sense, then, the commentary straddles the line between Duran's own learning experiences and his teaching, reflecting an element of both activities. Thus, as a student might do, Duran picks and chooses from his predecessors, and seems finally to approach Maimonides from a Gersonidean viewpoint.

Duran, a member of the Iberian Jewish urban elite, and in particular of the philosophically educated medical profession, participated in an intellectual world that was grounded in an assumption of the fundamental validity of rational thought. At the same time, this world was consciously Jewish. By adhering to the Maimonidean synthesis of the Jewish religious tradition with scientific knowledge and the ideal of reason, the two sides could cohere. In a number of different ways, rationalism could be absorbed into Judaism. As we have seen, Duran, for one, seems to have been comfortable with that synthesis, and even with some of its more radical versions.

Philosophical Eclecticism

In the thirteenth century, Aristotelian Jewish philosophy had been at a peak. The translation into Hebrew of, among many other works, ibn Rushd's commentaries on Aristotle and the immensely influential *Guide of the Perplexed* led to what has been called "the consolidation of Spanish rationalism under the banner of Maimonides."¹ By the end of the century, Aristotelianism was dominant among the majority of philosophically inclined writers, and in many cases was considered identical with philosophy itself. Kabbalists, too, like Isaac ibn Latif (c. 1210–1280) and Abraham Abulafia (1240–c. 1291), were influenced by Aristotelian ideas.²

A hundred years later, however—which is to say, by the time Duran was active—new generations of Provençal and Iberian Jewish philosophers had developed more eclectic systems of thought, many of which prominently featured Neoplatonic ideas. In a sign of the general shift away from radical Aristotelianism, both Abraham ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi, two earlier thinkers influenced by such ideas, would enjoy something of a vogue in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

That ibn Ezra's writings were intensely studied and commented on, including by Duran, was indicative both of deepening interest in astrological theory and of the increasing incorporation of Neoplatonic elements into Aristotelian thought.³ Similarly inspired in great part by ibn Ezra was the radically naturalist Neoplatonism developed by a circle of philosophers in Castile.⁴ Judah Halevi's writings, themselves strongly influential in Duran's work, also enjoyed a revival at

the turn of the fifteenth century, exemplified in the effort by a group of Provençal commentators on the *Kuzari* to work out a heavily astrological version of Jewish philosophy.⁵

In this chapter I trace some of the same philosophical tendencies examined in Duran's commentary on the *Guide* as they appear in his early philosophical *responsa*, a number of which are still extant. Of these epistles, two (which I have termed "On the Hebdomad" and "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*," respectively) were copied by Meir Crescas into his manuscript collection of Duran's writings discussed in Chapter 2. In that manuscript Meir reports that "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*" was a response to a question of his (Meir's), and that "On the Hebdomad" was a response to a question merely "that was asked of him [Duran]."⁶ A third philosophical letter (which I have called "On Immortality and Eternal Damnation") can be found copied elsewhere, is usually collected together with the other two, and is also sometimes said to have been written to Meir Crescas.⁷

None of the three has been dated, though both "On the Hebdomad" and "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*" are signed by Duran with his preconversion name: Profayt Duran ha-Levi. The third is not signed at all—and that, plus the fact that it does not appear in Meir Crescas's manuscript collection, suggests either that it was not written to Meir Crescas but to another individual and later collected with the others or that it was written later, after Meir's manuscript was completed. If this last suggestion is right, it would have been composed while Duran was living as a Christian.

After surveying Duran's general facility with philosophical argumentation, I consider a point of possible contact between Duran and Hasdai Crescas on the issue of Jewish dogma, and then turn to Duran's eclectic incorporation, into his Maimonidean system, of terminology and ideas drawn from Judah Halevi on divine emanation and from Abraham ibn Ezra on astrology.

PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

I begin with the one philosophical letter definitely written by Duran to his student Meir Crescas.⁸ In it Duran explains human perfection, and does so in purely philosophical terms. Meir Crescas had asked about a confusing phrase in a book called *Sefer ha-Tamar*, an Arabic divination text by Abu Aflah of Syracuse, translated into Hebrew in

fourteenth-century Provence.⁹ In copying this letter into his manuscript, his pride rather touchingly shining through, Meir notes that it is “the answer of the great sage, my perfect teacher *maestre* Profayt Duran ha-Levi, to me the writer, the smallest of his students.”¹⁰

One of a series of aphorisms attributed in the text to *Suleiman* (King Solomon) had proved obscure: “The hearts inclined to the desire, and the desire to the temperament, and the temperament to the divine will, and the divine will, its solution is *aggadah*, and the solution of *aggadah* is emanation and the solution of emanation is perfection and the solution of perfection is hidden.” In his reply, Duran interprets this phrase as a wonderfully concise expression of “the final felicity of man and the purpose of the perfection that is possible for him to attain and the causes that bring him to it and the path to this [end].” He acknowledges the controversy over the details of this perfection among “sages of investigation,” but also notes, rather approvingly, that the phrase encapsulates “what the important philosophers said about it and where the opinions of the great ones agree.”¹¹

Duran propounds three introductory principles before turning to interpret the words from *Sefer ha-Tamar* as expressing them. For our purposes it is necessary only to look at the introductory principles. The first is a thoroughly philosophical view of what constitutes human perfection:

The ultimate perfection of man occurs in the part of the soul by which [man] is particularized and that [part of the soul] is the intellectual faculty and it [occurs] when [the soul] is perfected by the apprehension of those intelligibles that are attainable. [Aristotle] has written about this in one [of the chapters of] the *Book of the Qualities* [*Nicomachean Ethics*] and [al-Ghazali] in his preface to *The Intentions* [*Maqāsid*], and most of the philosophers have agreed on this [principle]. Indeed, as for the quality of this perfection, one sect thinks that the hylic intellect turns into the acquired intellect and that the more intelligibles one acquires, the more one’s intellect is perfected. And [another] sect thinks that there is a higher level [than this] and it is [achieved] when this hylic intellect, after its perfection, is unified with the separate [intellect] and conjoins with it [in] a conjunction [by means of] apprehension. And ibn Rushd has written at length about this and upholds this possibility in his treatise called *The Possibility of Conjunction*,¹² and the true prophets arrived at this level while they yet lived. Maimonides has explained this in his chapter about prophecy, *Guide* II.37.¹³

Duran explains human perfection in intellectual terms: the rational faculty apprehends intelligibles while the body lives. And afterward? There are two opinions on the nature of immortality: some, according

to Duran, believe that it consists in the sum total of the intelligibles apprehended in life, the Gersonidean view. The more eternal truths one has learned over the course of one's life, the more blissful (or at least interesting), presumably, immortality will be. Others believe that there is yet a higher level of immortality, namely, that the perfected human intellect becomes conjoined with the agent intellect after death, presumably enjoying *all* of the intelligibles comprehended in the agent intellect. Duran refers us to the *Guide* II.37, where Maimonides discusses the intellectual overflow "through which we have intellectual cognition" and its different effects on different men, among them men of science and prophets.¹⁴ Presumably Duran understands Maimonides to hold the second opinion with respect to this conjunction.

Then Duran turns to the nature of prophecy itself: "Second, the prophesying soul is particularized by three virtues [that differentiate it] from the rest of the human souls: one, knowledge of the future; two, subjugation of the matter of the world; three, and this is the most considerable, knowledge of the secrets of existence. And truth emanates suddenly without intermediate boundaries, and this happens to it because of the conjunction with the separate [intellect]. [Al-Ghazali] already wrote this in *The Intentions* and *The Balance of Inquiries*,¹⁵ and [Maimonides] hinted about it in his estimable book."¹⁶ Just as the human soul is differentiated from that of animals by the intellectual faculty, so too the prophet's soul is differentiated from the soul of regular humans by three virtues, or abilities. First, the prophet can see the future; second, he can control matter, that is, perform miracles; third, he knows "the secrets of existence." Duran is evidently alluding to knowledge about the created world that can be attained only by prophecy, as discussed above in Chapter 3. If we follow Duran's position there, we might include among these "secrets of existence" knowledge of the nature of celestial matter and some partial knowledge of the separate intellects. Prophetic knowledge is therefore of two types: knowledge of sublunar events before they happen and knowledge about the universe that cannot be attained through the unaided use of human reason.

Finally, Duran turns to the requirements for prophecy:

Third, this perfection, however it comes to be, will indeed come with perfection of the temperament and its equability and the disposition particular to it, and with choice [free will] and intellection to bring the intellect from potentiality to actuality by the apprehension of

the sciences. And with these two causes, [Aristotle] thinks that this [makes] achieving [prophecy] possible. But according to the opinion of the men of Torah, there is a third cause here and it is the divine will. [Maimonides] has explained this in [*Guide*] II.32. And if what is intended by the “divine will” is what some of the later sages understood, namely, what is written in the Book of *Adam Rishon*,¹⁷ about which the master hinted (according to their opinion) at the end of [*Guide*] II.33, then the philosophers acknowledge this reason also.¹⁸

As Duran describes it here, an individual must first be physically perfect, as measured by the equability of his temperament. That is to say, the humors and qualities in the body should be perfectly balanced. This equable temperament allows the development of a disposition toward intellection. And the perfection of the intellect itself is achieved through the study of the sciences. According to the philosophical view, prophecy is automatically and necessarily attained once all these requirements have been met. As Duran himself notes, this is the view expressed in *Guide* II.32, where Maimonides describes the philosophical opinion thus: “when in the case of a superior individual who is perfect with respect to his rational and moral qualities, his imaginative faculty is in its most perfect state, and when he has been prepared in the way that you will hear, he will necessarily become a prophet, inasmuch as this is a perfection that belongs to us by nature.”¹⁹

According to Maimonides, however, this is not the approved Jewish view—that of the “men of Torah.” Instead, these men hold that prophecy can be withheld even from someone who is physically and intellectually prepared, if God so wills it: “It may happen that one who is fit for prophecy and prepared for it should not become a prophet, namely, on account of the divine will.”²⁰ In the final line of the extract above, Duran cites the argument of some later interpreters of the *Guide* to the effect that when Maimonides speaks of “divine will” in this context, he means secretly to indicate something other than what is usually considered to be the divine will. According to this interpretation, Maimonides believes the two positions—the philosophical position and the position of the Torah—to be entirely congruent, but exoterically explains them as disparate.

Duran’s description of the path to perfection according to the philosophers is thus consistent with his Maimonideanism, in that he accepts the philosophical understanding of prophecy as Maimonides explains it in the *Guide* while implicitly (“according to their opinion”) distancing himself from the more radical interpretation of

Maimonides as having been secretly in agreement with the Aristotelian view. In passing, we may note with some amusement that Duran is choosing to read an obscure sentence attributed to Solomon in a text of magical practices as a description of a philosophically conventional view of prophecy.

In this letter as in his other philosophical *responsa*, Duran reveals a broad and detailed familiarity with philosophical arguments as well as a confidence in deploying them. The letter “On Immortality and Eternal Damnation” is another fine example of his approach. In it, he responds to the question “whether, according to our faith, some individual souls have immortality and eternal salvation, and whether a soul that sins a particular sin receives punishment and pain and eternal cutting off.”²¹ The question has two parts: first, whether there is such a thing as eternal salvation, and second, whether there is also eternal damnation. Duran answers as a philosopher, with arguments based on logical premises and scarcely a biblical proof text to be seen until he is at least halfway through. For Duran, the philosophical approach to questions of religious doctrine was no merely rhetorical exercise. It is his home ground, and, by implication, the home ground of his intended audience as well.

For Duran, the first part of the question hardly merits discussion, for in his opinion it has already been settled by the philosophers as well as by “men of Torah.” In this case, both groups admit eternal salvation. Even Aristotle, according to Duran, believed in the immortality of the soul and, he notes, established it in *De anima*. The only disagreements among philosophers have concerned not the fact but only the nature of the soul’s immortality. And since immortality and salvation exist, so, too, do their opposites: what Duran calls “cutting off and eternal punishment.”

This reasoning he bases on an Aristotelian syllogism: given two states opposed to each other, if one exists, so does the other. If there is such a thing as “black” in the world, then there is such a thing as “white.” Therefore, if immortality and eternal salvation exist, eternal cutting off and destruction exist as well. Duran’s first proof text is taken not from the Bible but from al-Ghazali’s (c. 1058–1111) *Maqāṣid*, which he cites by its translated Hebrew title, *Kavvanot ha-Filosofim* (“Intentions of the Philosophers”). This work consists

of a summary of positions held by the “philosophers,” collected by al-Ghazali originally for the purpose of refuting them. As was common by the fourteenth century, however, Duran appears to assume that al-Ghazali was not a critic but a proponent of these same theories:²² “The sage al-Ghazali [lit. Abuḥamid] acknowledged it also in the *Intentions*. This is his expression: ‘and a being shall die without reaching the desired object, and desire shall remain and consciousness, and that is the great pain which has no limit to it.’ And the intended [meaning] of this is: that [the great pain] is of infinite duration, for that which is of infinite intensity is impossible.”²³

Duran parses al-Ghazali carefully, commenting that, in saying that after death one suffers great pain with “no limit to it,” al-Ghazali cannot intend by this something impossible—that is, that the *intensity* of the pain is infinite. What al-Ghazali must mean instead is that the pain the soul experiences after death is of finite intensity but of infinite duration. Duran’s reading of al-Ghazali’s words here is strikingly similar to Moses Narboni’s in his commentary on the *Maqāṣid*. According to Narboni, al-Ghazali believed that the pain suffered by a soul after death refers to being denied conjunction with the agent intellect. Narboni, like Duran, specifies that from this we can learn that al-Ghazali believed in postmortem reward and punishment. Narboni also makes the point that al-Ghazali appears to agree here with the rabbis.²⁴

Duran has often been grouped together with Hasdai Crescas and his students Zerahyah Halevi and Abraham ben Judah Leon.²⁵ A slightly older contemporary of Duran, Crescas was a highly important figure in late fourteenth-century Catalonia in both philosophical (or antiphilosophical) thought and anti-Christian polemics. Crescas’s single great work of religious philosophy, *Or ha-Shem*, was written too late for Duran to have read it in its final form before composing his own works. *Or ha-Shem* was completed in 1412, though an earlier version came out two years earlier,²⁶ whereas Duran’s last known dated work is from 1403. On the issue of how to categorize Jewish doctrine, however, there are distinct similarities between them.

In the second half of “On Immortality and Eternal Damnation,” Duran addresses the question of whether, if someone *disagrees* with the argument he has just given about eternal punishment, that person

is then himself “cut off and eternally punished.” And in the process Duran sketches out a threefold system categorizing the various types of heresy, following the listing of Jewish dogma in Maimonides’ Laws of Repentance:²⁷ “The first is denial of something which depends on divine statute for His existence and His unity and other things—and this is the particular thing by the name of ‘heresy’ [*minut*] and about this scripture says: ‘*And they shall go out and look upon the carcasses of the men who have rebelled against me.*’ (Is. 66:24) And it does not say ‘*who have rebelled absolutely*’—it means that they sinned in what depended on it.”²⁸ The first kind of heretics, according to Duran, consists of those who fall into the category of *minut*. These *minim* appear often in the Talmud; in English, the word is often rendered as “sectarians.” According to Duran, they reject matters that are dependent on “His existence and His unity”—that is, doctrines dependent on there being a divinity, that he exists, and that he is One. To reject any one of these doctrines is by implication to reject the existence or unity of God.²⁹

Duran’s second category: “The second is denial of that which depends on belief in prophecy, in its existence and the [uniqueness] of the prophecy of Moses our Teacher, upon him be peace, and this is the particular thing that goes by the name ‘unbelief’ [*apikorsut*], a name derived from denier [*kofer*] after *karos* in the Greek language, and as Galen wrote in the first chapter of his book, *On the Natural Faculties*.”³⁰ These, therefore, are doctrines for which, if one rejects one of them, one has rejected the possibility of prophecy (revelation).³¹ Finally, Duran’s third category is “denial of what depends on the law of the Torah, in its being from heaven and that it will not change, and that is the specific thing that goes by the name denial.”³² These are dogmas for which, if one rejects them, one has rejected the word of the Torah itself, its divine source, or its unchangeable nature.³³

The important thing to note in this list is that Duran phrases the issue by, as it were, working backward. By defining the *denial* of a doctrine, he is in fact constructing a threefold or, actually, fourfold positive division of Jewish doctrine: fourfold because, by excluding the particular issue of eternal reward and punishment from the three categories of heresy, he implicitly adds a fourth positive category to the list: namely, nonheresy.³⁴

One significant aspect of this fourfold categorization of Jewish doctrine is that while Duran is very clearly drawing from Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, his shaping of this material is almost perfectly echoed

in the division of Jewish doctrines found in Hasdai Crescas's *Or ha-Shem*. The first division enumerated by Duran consists of those things that depend on the existence and oneness of God. According to Crescas, the first category of doctrines includes roots or first principles without which one cannot imagine revelation of a divine law: that is to say, they are the "first principles of the divine Torah" that depend on "belief in the existence of God."³⁵ The second category for Duran is made up of those things that depend on prophecy and revelation, again matched in Crescas's category of, in this case, ideas the acceptance of which makes possible belief in revelation in general. Duran's third category depends on the actual, unchangeable word of Torah; for Crescas, the third section is made up of true doctrines, namely, doctrines actually taught by the Torah: "true beliefs which we who believe in the divine Torah believe and which are such that one denying any one of them is called a sectarian."³⁶

As for the fourth category: in introducing the issue of heresy, Duran defines it by implication: "I say that if we imagine one who contradicts this hypothesis—[saying,] that is, that there is no cutting off and eternal punishment—it is not proper according to our faith that heresy [*minut*] be attributed to him."³⁷ This can be compared profitably with Crescas's own fourth category, which consists of doctrines and theories about which the Torah gives no definitive teaching and "one who does not believe in them is not called a heretic."³⁸ This last category takes up the final quarter of *Or ha-Shem*, where Crescas gives his own opinion on all of these various matters, including the particular topic at hand in Duran's *responsum*—that is, punishment after death—which appears in Crescas under the title "Paradise and Hell."³⁹ Finally, one should note that Crescas himself denies that all souls survive death.⁴⁰

Since Duran's letter is undated, could it possibly have been written after 1410 or 1412, in which case he would likely have known *Or ha-Shem*? If that were the case, one might think he would simply have followed the straightforward positive categorization used by Crescas. One wonders, too, to whom this letter was written in the first place. It is addressed rather perfunctorily to "the lord scholar" ("*ha-adon ha-hoqer*"), which is certainly tantalizing. Sadly, however, we know too little about this text to do more than speculate.

But let me note one more possible point of contact. In *Ma'aseh Efod*, as we will see in Chapter 11, Duran's scheme for meditating on the text of the Hebrew Bible focuses on that text's power when held

in the memory. Duran's favorite term for this inner contemplation of the Bible is "keeping in the heart" (*shemirah ba-lev*, or *shemirah ba-levavot*); it is a concept that engrosses him throughout the introduction to *Ma'aseh Efod*, usually coupled with the term "remembering" (*zikhronah*). In order to keep the Torah in the heart, one needs to know it, and to that crucial end, Duran in *Ma'aseh Efod* lays out fifteen rules for enhancing the memory.⁴¹ For as he explains in introducing them, proper study and comprehension of the Bible can be effectuated only when one knows the material by heart.⁴²

I am tempted to see an echo of Duran's emphasis on memorization, and even meditation, in Hasdai Crescas's introduction to *Or ha-Shem*, where he notes that one cannot perform the commandments without knowing them, and continues:

Since knowing the commandments of the Torah is the straight path that brings [one] to [ultimate] perfection, it is therefore proper that knowing [them] be attained in the most perfect fashion possible; perfecting [one's] knowledge of the words and reviewing them, which should be done in three [ways]: with careful examination of them, and with simple understanding, and with keeping and remembering them. . . . And keeping and remembering them is either by abbreviating them, or by presenting qualities that are the foundations and cornerstones of the Oral Torah in the form of signs [*simanim*], [since] one of the mnemonic techniques [*ofnei ha-zekhirah ha-takhbulyit*] is to make signs for subjects so that one does not forget them. And all the more so with that which the Torah commanded about meditating on them always, for all this is the root and great foundation of keeping and remembering them.⁴³

That is to say, the salvific "knowing the commandments of the Torah" is a matter of learning the words and turning them over in your mind, which should be achieved in three areas, first by careful examination, which means learning the words accurately, then through a general grasp of their meaning, and then by "keeping and remembering" them. This last phrase, as Crescas goes on to elaborate, is associated with memorization and, in particular, mnemonic techniques. True, where Duran focuses on the text of the Hebrew Bible, Crescas is concerned with knowing the Law. But it would not be surprising if Crescas had read *Ma'aseh Efod* and associated the phrases used by Duran with advice for improving one's memory of *halakhah*.

Whether or not there was any direct influence between Profayt Duran and Hasdai Crescas, there is no real evidence for the common assertion that Duran served as a tutor in Crescas's household.⁴⁴

It is possible that Duran's early philosophical and rabbinic education was acquired among the students of Hasdai Crescas (or of Nissim of Girona) in Barcelona, a city with many ties to Perpignan, although it is perhaps more likely that he was educated in his own city, which was by no means a philosophical (or rabbinic) backwater, and considering what seems to be the strong influence of fourteenth-century Perpignan residents Moses Narboni and Joseph ibn Kaspi on Duran's early writings.⁴⁵ *Kelimat ha-goyim*, composed probably during the late 1390s, is dedicated by Duran to the "glory of the rabbis and crown of the believers,"⁴⁶ a figure reasonably presumed to be Hasdai Crescas himself, in part because the poem that prefaces the work includes an explicit reference to the name Hasdai, "*le-Hasdai gedol 'am*."⁴⁷ Finally, there are concepts found in Duran's works that seem to have been popular in the circle of Crescas and his students, notably the idea of circumcision as atonement for original sin.⁴⁸

Yet even assuming some kind of contact, to what extent can Crescas and Duran really be classed together? They shared some philosophical interests, but these are most clearly to be noticed in their common vocabulary and their shared concern with the fight against Christianity. From a more purely philosophical standpoint, however, the differences outweigh the similarities, and even their general approach toward Christianity shows points of divergence. In *Or ha-Shem*, for example, Crescas systematically argues against the principles of Aristotelian physics as they are enunciated in Maimonides' *Guide*—an exercise unthinkable to Profayt Duran, who is far more committed to Maimonidean rationalism. In general, Duran's epistemology, his cosmological system, and his appreciation of philosophical truth and the validity of mathematics, logic, and even metaphysics coincide at many points more closely with the fourteenth-century scientist Gersonides than with Crescas.

Ultimately, whether or not the two were in direct communication, which could well have been the case, they were both members of the Jewish elites in major Aragonese cities and moved in the same court circles. They also moved in the same intellectual world, one mediated not only by personal contact but also by postal communication and the dissemination of manuscripts. That similar ideas can be found in their writings should not be astonishing.

JUDAH HALEVI AND ABRAHAM IBN EZRA

In general, Duran's thought is characterized by a certain philosophical eclecticism rooted in a basically Maimonidean system. As Kalman Bland has expressed it, Duran "salvaged Maimonidean bric-a-brac and used the disconnected fragments for building blocks."⁴⁹ But what was the cement that held those blocks together? Some of the connective tissue can be traced to Judah Halevi, whom Duran cites regularly.⁵⁰ For example, Duran conflates Halevi's "divine faculty" with Maimonides' more normative terminology of divine emanation. This can be seen in the glosses on the *Kuzari* cited earlier, and in Duran's 1393 eulogy, to which we shall return in Chapter 10, where a phrase from Ezekiel ("I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself" [38:23]) is read by Duran in the following fashion: "Perhaps [Ezekiel] hinted in this verse of an even more delicate matter, namely, then [at the time of the coming redemption] there will exist a wondrous disposition to a superfluity of the emanation of knowledge and prophecy, and with the passing of the [people's] intellect to actuality in knowledge and apprehension, the Lord will be magnified and sanctified."⁵¹

One understanding of the true sanctification of God, in other words, is realized in the development of the individual intellect such that the flow of knowledge and prophecy passes from God to man. That is to say, when an individual develops a high level of "disposition" to the divine emanation that transmits "knowledge and prophecy," and when as a consequence his intellect is actualized in "knowledge and apprehension," then he attains the condition meant by the phrase "the Lord will be magnified and sanctified." Duran seems to envision this disposition being produced miraculously ("wondrously") in the Jewish people at the time of the messianic redemption, as a public miracle along the lines of the miracles performed by Moses. In the continuation of this discussion, Duran describes how the emanation of form from the First Mover is, in a sense, the revealing of God's power in existence. ("It is not impossible that it might be said that His power and His being are revealed and spread out and there is an appearance of Him in what exists, and from what is not Him.")⁵² God's form is present in the world because "His power and His being" infuse and permeate all of existence. As God's power "flows," the receptivity of the created world determines the degree of "association" with him, as expressed, Duran points out, by Halevi's "parable of the sun" from *Kuzari* IV.15.

This metaphor of Halevi's Duran expounds as follows: "Thus the sun varies in how its light manifests in various bodies which receive the light, and if it [the body] in its essence is like crystal and rubies, it will receive light with a perfect reception, and after them is the level of pure air and pure water, and after them are the polished bodies and after them the rest of the bodies according to their levels."⁵³ Duran continues with a glossed paraphrase of Halevi:

Such is the situation with the *divine faculty*, for the truth and quality of every substance go according to how much of the divine and its life and its light is in [that substance], and [the *divine faculty*], which spreads through existent things according to their level, from the mineral and the vegetable, is one. But the appearance [or, better, visibility] of its power is due to the variety of subjects receiving the light and the rays, and since the most perfect of these existent things are the choice ones of man, like the prophets and the sages, the divine light is most perfect in them to spread out their souls in the reception of His light and His ray. For the *divine faculty* is like a watcher and observer for one with whom it is proper to cleave, and therefore everyone who is outstanding in wisdom and perfection will increase his disposition to the reception of the light and the divine rays such that it is possible that it be said about him that he is the tabernacle of that light. . . . And so that it is not thought from this that there is cleaving in substance with one of the existents, [Scripture] refers to this matter with the language of magnification and sanctification, as it said, "*I will magnify myself and I will sanctify myself,*" for He is holy.⁵⁴

Sublunar reality is thus, for Halevi, graded by its receptivity to the divine faculty, the *amr ilahi* (or '*inyan elohi* in Judah ibn Tibbon's Hebrew). What Duran has done, however, is to merge Halevi's divine faculty with the more standard Aristotelian idea of divine emanation, very much present in the thought of Maimonides, namely, the emanation of form from the First Mover.

In fact, Duran's treatment of the divine emanation also shades into astrological conceptions under the influence of Abraham ibn Ezra. This is perhaps most visible in his letter on the number seven, to which we shall return in Chapter 6.⁵⁵ For my purposes here it is pertinent to focus on a passage near the end of that letter where Duran, having explained why the number seven was chosen to appear so often in the Hebrew Bible and also in the world of nature, turns to explicating some of the more obscure comments made by Abraham ibn Ezra in his biblical commentary.

Duran's Hebrew is sometimes stilted and awkward, sometimes confusing, but he hardly ever seems deliberately to obfuscate. Here, however, he does. He writes that he is going to discuss "the power connecting existence as a whole" (*ha-koah ha-qosher ha-nimtza bi-khlalo*), notes that there is not enough space to discuss the varying opinions of the philosophers, and begins by citing places where he believes there are hints of this "connecting force."⁵⁶

He reverts to type by citing first *Guide* I.72, a lengthy and fascinating chapter on the unity of the universe and the divine forces that govern it, with numerous comparisons between the universe and the human individual. Though Duran does not specify, I take him to be pointing to the section where Maimonides says that just as there is a force that connects the parts of a human and governs them, which the physicians have "frequently named 'nature,'" so there is "in the world as a whole a force that connects the portions one with the other" (in ibn Tibbon's Hebrew: *ba-'olam bi-khlalo koah yiqshor qetzato bi-qtzato*).⁵⁷ Maimonides follows this up with the statement: "As to this force, there is speculation whether or not it subsists through the intermediary of heaven."⁵⁸

In his letter, Duran cites four further sources: Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* (probably meaning the same passage he paraphrased above); Halevi's *piyyut* "Lord, Where Shall I Find You?" (a famous poem on the paradoxical immanence and transcendence of God, which prominently includes the words "Your [God's] glory fills the world"); a line from the chapter "On the Unity of God in Bahya ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart*, namely, "When you get to the point where He is not to be found by your mind and senses, but seems to be an inseparable part of you while you are contemplating His deeds, then you have reached the very knowledge of Him which is insisted upon by the prophet"⁵⁹]; and Abraham ibn Ezra's long astrological-cosmological comment on Exodus 33:23, where he describes the various structures of the cosmos.⁶⁰

All four of these sources, Duran argues, refer to the same phenomenon: "The glory of the Lord fills the world and His power is spread out and emanated in existent things, in their generality, even though they are not alike in their receptivity, like the vegetable and the animal which are disposed to receive the *divine faculty* more than the mineral and man who is disposed to receive it more than they. And in this reception and disposition the grades of existents differ and even within the species of man there are great differences between

individuals in this receptivity.”⁶¹ Duran subsequently notes that there are activities commanded by the Torah that help increase this receptivity. Among these activities are some, having to do with Jewish ritual, that explicitly take into account astrological effects.

Thus, he notes that astrologers are of one opinion (and natural philosophers agree as well) that the moon indicates thought and the beginnings of all action and deed—if the moon’s power and its situation are beneficent, beneficial things are emanated to the lower world—and also that, in the time of the moon’s conjunction (with the sun), the moon enters the “domain of burning” and its power is much weakened.⁶²

That the moon governs thought and beginnings appears in Abraham ibn Ezra’s astrological works;⁶³ the notion that the moon in a favorable aspect produces favorable conditions on earth is clearly astrological; so is the technical concept of the “domain of the burning,” a narrow area close to the sun where the moon’s (or any planet’s) influence is weakened.⁶⁴ Presumably what Duran means to say is that, as the moon (as he mentioned earlier in the letter) was closely associated with the number seven—since the lunar month has four seven-day weeks in it—and the moon indicates thought and beginnings, and can cause good things to happen, this explains in part why the Jewish holidays tend to incorporate the number seven into their observance. Also, the time of the new moon—marked in Jewish liturgical practice—is when the moon’s power is weakened by its proximity to the sun and thus a potential time of danger. Duran then mentions yet another astrological interpretation: “the sign of Aries, a name derived from Seir, is a malefic house to the intermediate [degree], and also it increases [the element of] earth and [it is] the ruling house of the people and it is the seventh.”⁶⁵ He then suggests that his correspondent take a look at a number of different comments by ibn Ezra and understand them in light of what he has just said.⁶⁶

The implications are instructive. First, Duran claims that Maimonides *and* Judah Halevi *and* Bahya ibn Paquda can and should be marshaled to interpret ibn Ezra. Duran identifies Halevi’s divine faculty with the intellectual emanation from the agent intellect known to Maimonides. And these respected Jewish philosophers, perhaps coincidentally all of Iberian origin, uniformly acknowledge the same “connecting power.” That all four quite disparate Jewish scholars should be understood as referring to the same phenomenon, namely, the pervading presence of the divine faculty, the divine emanation,

in the world, is richly evocative of Duran's general philosophical inclusiveness.

Second, here we see Duran at his most astrological. What he is suggesting is that the Torah—for example, by constructing the Jewish holidays according to astrological principles—is deploying astrology in order to “increase the disposition to the divine faculty.” That is to say, while the holidays may be timed to prevent negative influences from the heavens, other divine commandments, as Duran notes, are intended to improve the disposition toward the divine emanation. By this Duran may mean the ethical commandments that tend to perfect the corporeal body and the ethical qualities that are so necessary for physical and mental perfection. But he also may mean the particular regulations governing the Temple sacrifices that enabled the divine emanation through which the priests were able to wield the name of God and use it to perform miracles.⁶⁷

The commentary on the *Guide* reflects Duran's early training in philosophy. All his subsequent writings—as, in a way, medieval Jewish philosophy in general—bear the strong imprint of Maimonides' language and thought; he cites the *Guide* almost as fluently as he cites the Bible. His philosophical *responsa* are fully in line with his *Guide* commentary while also giving a good sense of the range of Duran's reading in the classic works of Jewish and Arabic philosophy.

Ultimately, in other words, Maimonidean thought was not sufficient in itself. It became for Duran both a framework for structuring his own ideas and a kind of linguistic protective coloration for concepts drawn from areas that ranged far wider: from the Neoplatonism of Judah Halevi and Abraham ibn Ezra to the philosophically appealing kabbalistic themes flowing through the systems of contemporary thinkers like Moses Narboni, and even, as we will see later, to current quasi-magical practices of healing and contemplation.

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Science and Jewish Identity

Science, even in its weak medieval sense of “natural philosophy,” is usually thought of as unrelated to particular religious beliefs. And to some extent, the knowledge of the natural world sought by medieval scholars was indeed held by them to be “true” in a universal sense. God’s creation was the same for all, and the tools of logic and mathematics used to understand that creation were a matter of common agreement, even among scholars of widely differing religious and philosophical orientations.

This nonsectarian quality may also be said to characterize the basic mathematical techniques, practical methods of astronomical calculation from tables, and use of astronomical instruments that, as we saw in Chapter 2, were employed by Profayt Duran and his students. Their studies were spurred by what appear to have been pragmatic motives, probably related to the professional opportunities offered by the Aragonese court; apart from the language of study, Hebrew, they might just as easily have been conducted by Christians.

But this was not always the case. At the very least, one’s religious orientation could spur one to pursue certain specific areas of scientific investigation. Here I begin by looking at Duran’s more technical astronomical writings and describe the considerations that may have shaped the particular direction of his interest. In later chapters, I turn first to his responsum on the properties of the number seven for an example of the uses of mathematics and number theory for potentially polemical purposes, then to his reasons for composing the calendrical work, *Heshev ha-Efod*, a scant few years after his forced

baptism, and finally to his two explicitly polemical works, *Al tehi ka-avotekha* and *Kelimat ha-goyim*, with an eye to their attitudes toward reason and scientific knowledge and the relation of those attitudes to religious belief and religious identity.

Of the works to be treated in this part of the book, only the last three (*Heshev ha-Efod*, *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, and *Kelimat ha-goyim*) have been dated to Duran's postconversion years. His astronomical researches began relatively early in life and may well have continued into later decades; his letter on the number seven is undated.

Jewish Astronomy

Between Maimonides and Gersonides

I begin with a quick sketch of the background to Duran's view of astronomy.

As an attempt to apprehend the particulars of the heavens, to understand their motions, and to find mathematical models that predict and explain those motions, astronomy was associated in the Middle Ages with mathematics, a field of endeavor often considered to possess a unique epistemological status and a superior claim to truth. To quote Gersonides, here following a long tradition beginning with Aristotle, "no mistake can befall concerning the truth produced by [the mathematical sciences] through mathematical demonstrations."¹ From its close dependence on mathematics, astronomy, too, thus gains a kind of epistemological certainty.

But astronomy is lofty also because it deals with a lofty subject, namely, the heavens. The stars and orbs, being made up of celestial matter, are eternal, unchanging, and therefore necessarily superior. It could therefore be said (and it was) that the natural science of the *greatest* nobility and excellence is astronomy. Gersonides again: "[Astronomy's] value for itself is clear because the significance of the inquiry is proportional to the significance of the subject of the inquiry, and it is clear that the subject of this inquiry, i.e., celestial body, is the most noble of all natural bodies, and the form that moves it [i.e., a separate intellect] is the most noble of all natural forms."² Moreover, according to the rationalist point of view, man's claim to immortality is predicated on his acquisition of eternal truths, *intelligibilia*. By studying astronomy, this line of reasoning goes, man ensures the immortality of his intellect.

The same idea can be expressed in more specifically religious terms. Through studying the stars and their motion, writes Gersonides, we may learn about their Creator, for (quoting Psalm 8:4–5) the stars are “the work of His fingers.”³ Or as Abraham ibn Ezra puts it: “Only when one knows the natural sciences and their proofs, learns the categories that are the ‘guardians of the walls’ taught by the science of logic, masters the science of astronomy with its absolute proofs based on mathematical knowledge, and comprehends the science of geometry and the science of proportions, can one ascend to the great level of knowing the secret of the soul, the secret of the supernal angels, and the concept of the world to come in the Torah, the Prophets, and the sages of the Talmud.”⁴

Duran draws from this tradition in composing the introduction to his work on the Jewish calendar, *Heshev ha-Efod*, to which we shall return below. In asking what makes the study of the heavens important, he even phrases the question in a manner very similar to Gersonides. But his answer differs—in part because *Heshev ha-Efod* is a calendrical work and not an astronomical treatise, but in part because of Duran’s own system of thought. He begins: “The sages have explained that the benefit of an inquiry and its perfection is according to the rank of the subject, the apprehension of which is [the purpose of] the inquiry; and that the rank of the subject—and its perfection or lack thereof—is [judged] according to its proximity or distance from the First Principle, the source and fountainhead of all rank and perfection, such that the inquiry into this Principle and of His attributes is absolutely the [most] high and perfect inquiry.”⁵ Where Gersonides praises astronomy as the study of a superior substance, namely, the celestial matter, Duran instead praises it as the study of something close to the *most* superior subject, namely, God. In his definition, what makes the heavenly bodies lofty or noble is their ontological superiority, defined by “proximity” to God. That “proximity” is in turn defined, Duran asserts, by the number of “intermediaries” between God and the object:⁶

Since the heavenly bodies are, among the rest of the created existents, the closest to this Principle, from this point of view—for their emanation [*shefa*] is from Him, may He be blessed, without intermediary, and as it says, “I, even my hands, have stretched out [the heavens]” (Is. 45:12), and all the nations agreed, because of this, that the Creator is in the heavens—behold, because of this, the inquiry into these bodies and the apprehension of them are among the most perfect

and important of all investigations. And, from this point of view, the investigation into the divine Torah and its laws is also one of the most important inquiries, since the emanation is from Him, may He be blessed, without intermediary, as it is said: “face to face the Lord spoke to him” (Ex. 33:11). And so if you find an investigation which combines these two subjects, I mean the heavenly bodies and the laws of the divine Torah, behold this investigation includes a large portion of perfection.⁷

In this celestial system, the intelligences of the spheres emanate from God, apprehending him and in turn emanating the lower intelligences. Their closeness to God is reflected in their motions, and by studying these, one investigates motions that are caused by God either directly or very proximately. The lowest of the intelligences is the agent intellect, from which there emanates in turn the superior knowledge that constitutes the prophetic experience. Duran’s subject, the Jewish calendar, thus combines two enterprises that come “directly” from God: the celestial motions and Jewish law.

Shortly thereafter, Duran repeats this important point: “Both the heavenly bodies and . . . the laws of the divine Torah . . . are called the deed of the Lord and the work of His hands, as it says about the heavenly bodies, ‘When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, etc.’ (Ps. 8:4–5). And about the Torah and the tablets, [it is said] ‘the work of God’ and ‘written with the finger of God,’ and these are attributed to the Lord since the emanation of both is from Him, may He be blessed, without intermediary.”⁸ By stating that the emanation associated with the Torah is without intermediary, Duran seems to allude to the emanation from the agent intellect that constituted the prophecy of Moses. As he asserts in his commentary on the *Guide*, the Bible teaches about “the emanation that emanated from Him, which is the world of the separate [intellects] that are emanated from Him first. . . . [I]t is said [that God] ‘speaks’ in order to teach about the emanation of the intellect upon the prophets.”⁹ Consequently, by studying the Torah, just as by studying the heavens, the human individual can achieve some knowledge of God. The celestial motions and the Torah share an ontological similarity. Both are close to the divine, and both show God as accessible to man.

Gad Freudenthal has emphasized that Gersonides, as a scientist, was the exception that proved the rule: the one medieval Jew who pursued scientific activity beyond the mere mastery of inherited knowledge. He traces this in part to Gersonides’ view that man comes

to know natural laws through sense experience, that immortality is attained through empirical knowledge of God's creation, and that knowledge of God's creation can be acquired particularly through study of the influences of the celestial bodies on the sublunar world.¹⁰ Duran seems inclined to follow his epistemological optimism, at least with respect to the ability of man to learn about God from the created world.

Having read Gersonides relatively early (as we saw in Chapter 3, he quotes the *Wars of the Lord* in his commentary on the *Guide*), Duran seems to have taken quite seriously his positive attitude toward the science of the heavens and to have engaged in rigorous inquiry into mathematical astronomy, although there is no evidence that he did so to the same extent as Gersonides. In addition to the class notes of MS Paris 1023 and other texts examined in Chapter 2, reflecting such practical needs as the mastery of astronomical tables and observational instruments, we have evidence that Duran spent time studying more theoretical texts. He quotes accurately the technical fifth book on astronomy of Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord*; he composed a commentary on ibn Rushd's *Abbreviation of the Almagest*, the seminal work of Ptolemy; he and his students compared ibn Rushd's text with a "Correction" of the *Almagest* by Jābir ibn Aflah; and he read and "reviewed" a work on theoretical astronomy by the fourteenth-century Joseph ibn Naḥmias that purported to supplant Ptolemy's system. A pattern emerges here: all four authors—Gersonides, ibn Rushd, ibn Aflah, and ibn Naḥmias—were critics of Ptolemy.

A fifth critic was Maimonides. In fact, it was likely Maimonides' discussion in the *Guide* of the incompatibility of Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian physics that focused Duran's astronomical interests on this particular topic, as it did both Gersonides and ibn Naḥmias. This subject merits a brief discussion of its own.

Medieval mathematical astronomy was based on the theoretical system described in the second-century *Almagest* of Ptolemy.¹¹ Because of its length and technical nature, the *Almagest* itself was an inappropriate text for beginners, and indeed was rarely used directly in Christian universities; there, the favored elementary text was John of Sacrobosco's thirteenth-century, nontechnical Latin treatise *De sphaera* ("On the Sphere"), which was sometimes complemented by

works on planetary astronomy known by the generic title *Theoricae planetarum* (“Of the Theory of the Planets”).

For Jews interested in learning basic descriptive cosmology, which was an integral part of the broad education expected of a member of the intellectual elite, as well as a religious duty, Sacrobosco’s text was available in Hebrew translation; they could also turn to cosmographies like Abraham bar Ḥiyya’s *Tzurat ha-Aretz* (“The Form of the Earth”) and the popular Hebrew translations from the Arabic of ibn al-Ḥaytham’s *Treatise on the Configuration of the World* and al-Farghānī’s *Elements of Astronomy*.¹² For someone who wished, practically speaking, to be able to compute the positions of the planets, lunar and solar eclipses, or other celestial phenomena, a variety of astronomical tables were available.¹³

Despite its prominence, or perhaps because of it, the *Almagest* itself had been the subject of sharp criticism in the twelfth century by such Muslim philosophers as ibn Bajja (d. 1138), ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), ibn Rushd (d. 1198), and al-Bīṭrūjī (fl. 1200), as well as by Maimonides. This group of scholars has been said to constitute an “Andalusian revolt against Ptolemaic astronomy.”¹⁴ Maimonides, as one of the group, and as we saw in Chapter 3, comments in *Guide* II.24 that a “true perplexity” is the conflict between the mathematical models of Ptolemy, with their epicycles and eccentric orbs, and the celestial physics of Aristotle, which posit that the celestial matter is by nature constrained to move in perfect circles of constant motion about a fixed point, namely, the center of the earth.¹⁵

Duran and his students were likewise involved in an ongoing investigation of the validity of the Ptolemaic system, and were well aware of the issues posed by Maimonides. As noted, he and at least two students seem to have studied ibn Rushd’s *Abbreviation of the Almagest* carefully over the course of years.¹⁶ This relatively concise work attempted to make the *Almagest* accessible to the beginning reader, though the author might simultaneously take issue with certain aspects of Ptolemy’s thought. Of the eleven manuscripts of the Hebrew translation of this text, three include numerous glosses and comments, some of which are attributed to Duran.¹⁷ Duran’s comments in a final, lengthier form were eventually copied as a separate text.¹⁸

Alongside ibn Rushd, Duran and his astronomical study group read a similar work, the *Correction of the Almagest* [*Iṣlāḥ al-majisī*] by the twelfth-century Jābir ibn Aflāḥ of Seville, a treatise that ibn

Rushd drew from in composing his *Abbreviation*. It was translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona but seems to have been more popular among Jewish scholars, having been translated into Hebrew by Moses ibn Tibbon in 1274 and again by Jacob ben Makhir also in the second half of the thirteenth century. The second Hebrew translation was revised by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles in 1335.¹⁹ Ibn Aflah is repeatedly mentioned in Duran's commentary, and one of the manuscripts containing the final version of Duran's commentary includes at the end a chapter-by-chapter list of ibn Aflah's criticisms of Ptolemy.²⁰

As José Bellver has noted, ibn Aflah's "criticisms" are not epistemological or cosmological. Instead, ibn Aflah attempts to simplify Ptolemy's mathematics and to fill in the gaps where Ptolemy fails to be sufficiently clear and detailed. His aim, according to Bellver, is to make Ptolemy easier to understand, not to uproot his system or even to criticize its accuracy as a whole. Bellver thus concludes that ibn Aflah does not belong properly to the Andalusian revolt against Ptolemaic astronomy.²¹ Nevertheless, if the list in the late manuscript of Duran's commentary on ibn Rushd is in fact by Duran or one of his students, as is likely, it was evidently at least in part for these "criticisms" that they read ibn Aflah's work.

In addition, Duran commented on Joseph ibn Naḥmias's mid-fourteenth-century Judeo-Arabic astronomical work *The Light of the World*, which he probably read in its Hebrew redaction. This book, which has been characterized as yet another, late example of the Andalusian revolt, was an attempt to modify the model developed by al-Biṭrūjī. It is what is called a homocentric model, which uses neither epicycles nor eccentrics but adheres to the Aristotelian physical requirement of concentric spheres producing circular motion about the fixed point of the earth's center. Ibn Naḥmias tries to account for the variations in speed and direction of the planetary motions by combining in each case a uniform circular motion of the sphere with a uniform circular motion of the poles of that sphere.²²

In his "review," a brief note copied into a manuscript of the Hebrew version, Duran attacks ibn Naḥmias specifically on the grounds that he does not succeed in explaining what seems to have been demonstratively proved, namely, that sometimes the planets are closer to the earth and sometimes more distant. In other words, ibn Naḥmias is trying to force sensible reality into conformity with theory:

There reached me the *New Heavens*, stretched out by the hands of the lofty sage R. Joseph ibn Nahmias whom it is proper to praise for his diligence and effort and attempt at what the souls of important ones yearn to know, even if reality did not aid him in fulfilling his intention. . . . He sought to make reality follow from theory.²³ He wrote one chapter to explain that the variation in the size of the diameter of the moon according to observation does not necessitate a variation in the distance of the moon from the earth. He said there that he posits that the center of the moon is always at [the same] distance from the center of the earth, but this is denied by sensory perception, according to those who observed, all of them in days of old, and reported that it was perceived by them without a doubt.²⁴

While ibn Nahmias would like to be able to explain away the varying sizes of the moon, he cannot, and in Duran's view this observable fact is proof that the moon is sometimes closer and sometimes farther away. This same issue occupies him for much of the rest of his comment, in which Duran discusses the diverse phenomena—including the variations in the visible diameter of the moon—that seem to demonstrate that planetary distances vary. Unless a homocentric model can account for those phenomena in some other way, the model cannot be considered to have succeeded in solving the “true perplexity” of Maimonides.

In this connection, it is pertinent to note that Duran's astronomical knowledge makes occasional appearances in works by him on other subjects. He mentions astronomical material, for example, in the course of his satirical letter *Al tehi ka-avotekha*. While insulting the Jewish apostate Pablo de Santa Maria, presumably a figure admired by his addressee David Bonjorn, Duran sneers: “Even I, my brother, know as you do all the great things [Pablo de Santa Maria] has done, and the spherical astronomy, without epicycle [or] variation of the poles [or] eccentric circle, [and that] he found some mysteries and high postulates.”²⁵ To suggest that Pablo has found an astronomical system that uses *none* of the existing models is to suggest that he has done something quite extraordinary; in the reversed sense required by the sarcastic tone, it would mean that when it comes to astronomy, Pablo is in quite over his head. Considering that the letter is written to the son of Jacob Bonjorn, a famous Perpignan astronomer, and that the son himself might have studied astronomy with Duran, the comment comes off as a jibe between two people expert in astronomy over the incompetence of a third, and is strongly evocative of the respect for scientific expertise, and for astronomical knowledge in particular, shared by Duran and his circle.

To return to ibn Naḥmias: it is precisely in a Maimonidean context that Duran sees the issue; he even alludes to Maimonides' description of astronomy and its problems as they appear in the *Guide*, and judges ibn Naḥmias to have failed because he was not able to meet Maimonides' challenge. Ultimately he proposes that ibn Naḥmias may not have been aiming for a model that matched all the observed realities of the heavens but simply wished to suggest that Aristotelian circular motion was able to account for variations in planetary motion. If so, ibn Naḥmias, in Duran's rather scornful view, may have been fully aware of the flaws of his model.

This is not to say, however, that Duran denied the desirability of finding a mathematical model both to describe the observed phenomena and to avoid the use of eccentrics and epicycles. On the contrary, his interest in other criticisms of Ptolemy shows that his attention was in fact drawn in that direction.

On the timeless grounds of being burdened with too much work, Duran in the end excuses himself from a thorough examination of whether ibn Naḥmias's system succeeds even in its more modest goals. But he does allow himself one final criticism, his most vehement, expressing utter astonishment at a particular mathematical theorem included by ibn Naḥmias. This brief moment of passion points to one of the impressive characteristics of Duran's engagement in astronomy. He may have been initially driven by cosmological or epistemological concerns, but his deepest inclinations tend to the mathematical. Most of his teachings in MS Paris 1023, discussed in Chapter 2, are about mathematical techniques. His interest in the asymptotes problem, which clearly derives from its mention in the *Guide*, at first led him to include a passage on the subject in his commentary on that work and then to master the subject sufficiently to write a commentary (itself derived from a Latin paraphrase) to the Hebrew version of the Arabic *On Two Lines*. Indeed, his interest in ibn Aflaḥ's *Correction of the Almagest* may also have been based primarily on the mathematical innovations and simplifications that ibn Aflaḥ provides for Ptolemy's system.

This leads to a final point about Duran *qua* astronomer. He did not compose original astronomical works, and indeed is hardly known for this side of his activities. But that he was technically proficient in the mathematics needed for the study of astronomical models is proof of his commitment to it, a commitment that goes far beyond knowing the fundamental principles of cosmology that was a basic component

of Iberian Jewish rationalist education. It goes even beyond competence in the “practice of astronomy”—namely, the ability to compute planetary positions and so on from astronomical tables—needed for astrological calculations. Beyond this, which he clearly knew how to do, he was also capable of describing the geometrical systems that underlay the tables.²⁶ What made Duran an astronomer, rather than just a member of the intellectual elite, or even a professional astrologer-physician, was his mastery of the mathematical principles that made medieval mathematical astronomy the rather difficult science it was.

A Jewish Cosmos

Number and Speech

Mathematics, absolutely fundamental to theoretical astronomy, would appear to be the most universal of all the sciences. If its appeal for Duran may have stemmed in part from a practical interest in its usefulness, he also saw it as the human intellect's most reliable tool for understanding the world, and, as I have argued, the only possible route to learning about the celestial realms and attaining the glimmer of knowledge about God those realms might provide. There was yet another aspect at work as well. It lay in the area of neo-Pythagorean speculation sometimes called arithmology: the "branch" of mathematics that explores the arithmetical properties of numbers and attributes to them religious or philosophical meaning. What was involved in Duran's case was the search for the divinely created mathematical patterns that underlay the entire cosmos, as revealed in the numerical and symbolic interconnections between the higher and lower realms, between the words of Scripture and the basic forms of reality, and among categories and classes of reality.

As noted in Chapter 4, Duran composed a brief essay on the numerical properties and cosmic significance of the number seven.¹ That number, pervasive in the Bible and the Apocrypha, is integral to many Jewish laws found in and derived from the scriptural text, and in particular those surrounding the Temple sacrifices.² In interpreting this steady recurrence, Duran draws on one of the few extant Hebrew arithmological works, the *Sefer melakhim* ("The Book of Kings") attributed to Qalonymos ben Qalonymos (c. 1287–c. 1328).³ Tracing each number of the first decade, Qalonymos, like Abraham ibn Ezra

in *Sefer ha-Eḥad*, discusses its mathematical properties; included also are lists of various items that come in, for example, sevens. Duran uses nearly all of Qalonymos's material on the number seven, as well as some on the numbers three and four and some of the author's asides. Many of his borrowings are verbatim, though on occasion he replaces Qalonymos's terminology with his own, rewrites phrases, or rearranges the order; he also alludes to or inserts relevant material from, among others, al-Ghazali's *Intentions*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Plato's *Timaieus*, and Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.

The essay begins with the usual modest disclaimers:

Lord of high degree, your letter, which *gives forth goodly words* (Gen. 49:21), came to me some days ago. In it you asked about the matter of some words by the sage ibn Ezra, may his memory be for a blessing, upon which your intellect paused. You regard me as one who comprehends [ibn Ezra's] paths and knows his ways, [but] you have estimated something in me which is not, and *thy condescension makes me great* (Ps. 18:36). That I am weak in every matter of the science of understanding and in particular in these secrets, *all the city of the people know* (Ruth 3:11) and I, even I, know. Behold, even with all this, I desire to do your will, my lord. And [so] I will write for your honor a little of that which appears suitable to your intention, although until now, because of the greatness of my labors, *to my neck they reached me* (Is. 30:28). But now that the Lord has enlarged me (Ps. 4:2), I [resolved] to attempt to achieve your will and to do according to all you have commanded me. I note that what you asked concerns in part the reason why the divine Torah singles out the hebdomad in many of its commandments, according to the opinion of ibn Ezra. I do not need to quote your words in this, since I presume a copy of your letter remains in your pure hand.⁴

This work, in short, responds to a query about an enigmatic comment or comments made by Abraham ibn Ezra regarding the ubiquity of the number seven in the Temple ritual and in the Bible in general. In the body of the letter, Duran interprets two or three of ibn Ezra's comments, but only in the context of his broader purpose.

He opens with purely arithmetical properties of the number that derive "from the aspect of its being prime": "It is composed of the first of the evens [two] and the second of the odds [five] and of the first of the odds [three] and the second of the evens [four]. For this [reason] it is called by the early sages a *mispar kolel* (a 'complete' or 'inclusive' number), and it hints at one of the mysteries of existence."⁵ At this point, Duran diverges from *Sefer melakhim* to ask what it *means* to be a *mispar kolel*. The term itself may be related to what

Porphyry called “comprehensiveness,” meaning a quality of number that “comprehend[s] all differences of numbers, reasons, species, and proportions.”⁶ But what are the “mysteries of existence” at which, in Duran’s opinion, the number hints? From the passages that follow, they are scientific and philosophical ways of classifying the ontological structure of the universe, as reflected in this case by the arithmetical configuration of the number seven.

Just as seven equals two plus five, Duran explains, so the created universe can be divided into two groups each of which can be analyzed according to five categories. Existent things can be divided first between objects perceptible to the intellect and objects perceptible to the senses. Each of these two groups can be further divided into the five Aristotelian “predicables” (known in Latin as *genus*, *species*, *differentia*, *accidens*, *proprium*). Nor does Duran stop there. He throws out a flurry of suggestions. Existents can be divided into other groups of two: causes and effects or the necessary and the possible. Those groups of two can be further divided into groups of five, according to the classes of sensible objects—intellect, form, matter, place, and time—ascribed by Duran to Plato’s *Timaeus*.

Still another analytical way of thinking about the universe follows from the fact that seven can also be understood as the sum of three plus four. The most obvious division of existent things into three groups is that of the so-called three worlds, a long-standing medieval conception of the cosmos as comprising the world of the immaterial beings (the angels, separate intellects, souls, etc.), the supralunar material world (the celestial spheres and their planets), and the sublunar material world (the earth and its atmosphere). Any element in each of these worlds can also be characterized by the Aristotelian four causes: the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final. As for the additional variety of ways the number four can structure and map the universe, Duran notes but does not bother listing them.

Duran’s abundance of divisions clearly reflects in part the medieval impulse to multiply interpretations. It also echoes the mathematical works he draws from, where numbers are classified into categories using different, but equally true, classifications: into odd and even, into composite and prime, and so on. But to judge from Duran’s particular examples, the “comprehensive” quality of the number seven means something more specific and important; it is an aspect of the underlying organization of the created universe. The structure of the cosmos matches up with the structure of the

number. In this sense, seven is the number of the whole—the number of the universe.

Duran now turns back from cosmic parallels to the number seven itself and its other “numerical properties,” and to his paraphrase of *Sefer melakhim*: “Let us return to the numerical properties of seven. Before it and after it are two nonprime numbers: before it four, six and after it eight, nine, and it is the middle point between them. Its double is fourteen, which is composed of the squares of one, two, and three, which are the nature of every number.”⁷ He explains how one, two, and three are the “nature of every number”: “Because the sum of one is greater than its square, and the square of three is greater than its sum, and the sum of two—in the middle between them—is equal to its square, therefore [they] include and encompass all the nature of number. And for another reason: in [three] is 1 plus the two species of multiplicity, the even and the odd [two and three], and also seven is the last of the natural odd numbers which are in the first level. The composition of seven is twenty-eight, and this is an equal number [*mispar shaveh*].”⁸

From here Duran launches into an elaborate attempt to unravel certain inconsistencies in mathematical terminology as they appear in Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary on Exodus. The problem facing Duran is that the term “perfect,” which, as noted, ibn Ezra applies to the number seven, cannot be so applied if it is taken in its usual meaning in the mathematical literature. Euclid and those after him called “perfect” a number that is equal to the sum of its aliquot parts (its divisors, excluding itself).⁹ No examples are given by Euclid himself, but the customary ones are the numbers six (since $1 + 2 + 3 = 6$) and twenty-eight (since $1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14 = 28$).¹⁰ For that reason, Duran suggests that ibn Ezra must have meant that a *multiple* of seven, namely twenty-eight, was perfect. He concludes that the confusion arises from the fact that sometimes Abraham ibn Ezra uses the term “perfect number” for the more common “equal number.”

He then enlarges the discussion by adducing the idea of a solid number,¹¹ referring directly to Euclid’s *Elements*,¹² which includes a section on number theory, and to Aristotle’s *De caelo*, which begins with a discussion of magnitude and dimension.¹³

Duran: “It has been explained, at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Book of the Elements*, that some numbers are solid and some are not solid. The solid number, as explained there in his listing, is made up of a number multiplied by another number that is

a multiple of two numbers.”¹⁴ A solid number therefore is one with three divisors. But seven, being prime, has no divisors other than itself: “And since the number seven is the last of the numbers [in the decade] which are not solid that encompasses [i.e., is divisible by] a number or numbers which are not solid, and it is impossible to add a number to it without its becoming solid or encompassing a solid number, for the number eight is a solid number, from [being a multiple of] two, behold, thus the number seven is a ‘perfect’ number according to this viewpoint. . . . And this is the [meaning] of ‘perfect’ according to what the philosopher wrote in the second chapter of [*De caelo*], and this is the reason for its being called a perfect number.”¹⁵

In Duran’s definition, then, seven is the largest number among the first ten that is not solid itself—that is, does not have three divisors—and does not encompass a solid number within it. Thus when ibn Ezra calls seven perfect, he is using it in this sense.

It is for all these reasons, Duran concludes, that seven plays such a major role in the Hebrew Bible, and in particular that the Sabbath, the seventh day, is often called “a Sabbath unto the Lord.” The number seven is in the first set of ten numbers, it is perfect, it is a *mispar kolel* in that it comprehends the structure of the universe, and it is far from being corporeal, which is to say that it is not “solid.”

Having completed his discussion of the mathematical characteristics of the number seven, Duran reverts to the question that drives this essay, namely, what is the significance of its repeated presence in the Bible? Abraham ibn Ezra, in his gloss on Numbers 23:1, writes “Seven altars: There are deep secrets only a few can understand. And there are sevens of days, months, years; the seven lambs offered for a burnt offering and the seven sprinklings. Also the Lord said to Job, ‘Take for yourself seven bulls and seven rams’ (Job 42:8). When the perfect is given to the perfect, then is renewed a spirit of understanding. And the wise will understand.”¹⁶

In Duran’s interpretation, this comment means that when the number seven, which is “perfect” in the way Duran has just explained, is offered up in the form of the Temple sacrifices to God, who is also perfect, then the divine prophetic efflux is evoked on high.¹⁷ In other words, ibn Ezra, noting the recurrence of the number seven in the instructions for the sacrificial services in the Temple, suggests that the

“perfection” of the number as expressed in those sacrifices becomes joined to the “First Cause.” The purpose of performing sacrifices in the Temple is thus to increase the receptivity to the divine prophetic emanation on the part, presumably, of the priest performing the sacrifices, enabling him to come to a knowledge of future events. As Duran stresses, and as noted in Chapter 4, “the Torah set down the commandments for the purpose of developing the receptivity [to divine emanation] insofar as possible.”¹⁸

To substantiate the point, Duran now invokes the more typically arithmological enumeration of the “existing things which are indicated by seven,” beginning with the seven planets. Again drawing very heavily from *Sefer melakhim*,¹⁹ he specifies how the planets, by means of their planetary rays, govern the sublunar world and the days of the week (“the days of each of the quarters of the month”), which in turn parallel the seven “natures and temperaments in health and in sickness.”²⁰ He mentions also the “climes of the earth” (“a natural division that follows from the celestial power as explained by the astrologers”) and the seven “aspects of the stars” that are “the cause of many changes in the lower world as explained in astrology.”²¹ These last-named “aspects” of planetary conjunction are the various ways in which two planets, as defined by their positions in the zodiac, can be related to each other, each with its own physical, climatological effect.²²

Other examples of “existing things indicated by seven” are the seven metals, the seven classes of living creatures, the seven ages of man,²³ and the seven categories of quantity. The sciences are seven, and seven is the minimum number of months a fetus must remain in the womb to be viable. Duran sums up by stating that “in general the number seven plays a great role in natural matters.” And here he quotes the statement of Maimonides that “the period of seven days . . . plays a great role in natural matters” and thus recalls Maimonides’ further assertion that “it does so likewise in matters pertaining to the Law. For the Law always tends to assimilate itself to nature.”²⁴ The thrust of the passage is to illustrate the physical influences of the number seven on the earth, influences that derive from the celestial domination of the seven planets.

The only part of this long passage not taken directly from *Sefer melakhim* is the most explicitly astrological element, namely, the planetary aspects, which Duran cites in connection with ibn Ezra’s astrological work *Reshit Hokhmah* (“The Beginning of Wisdom”)

and his commentary on Exodus. The cumulative effect is to suggest strongly that the appearance of the number seven in the Torah, and in the commandments in particular, reflects a real, physical correspondence with the celestial patterns governing the natural world. Duran's proof text, in addition to his citation from the *Guide*, completes this impression: it is ibn Aflah's statement, in *Sefer ha-Tamar* (discussed in Chapter 4), that "seven is natural from the point of view of existent things."²⁵

Finally Duran responds to the possible objection that the Author of the divine book should not have been dabbling in numerology. To the contrary, he suggests, numbers are a fundamental part of his creation. In support of this idea, Duran invokes "early sages" mentioned by Aristotle who believe that "numbers [are] the beginnings of existent things"—that is, that existence is founded on number. By "early sages" he certainly means the Pythagoreans; here he again cites the *Guide* (II.8),²⁶ where Maimonides discusses the music of the spheres and mentions the Pythagoreans by name. Duran also mentions the commentators on *Sefer Yetzirah* as holding the same belief; here he may have in mind Saadia, who notes his agreement with the author of *Sefer Yetzirah* that "things are created but their origins were the numbers and letters."²⁷ He also notes that taking into account the retrograde motion of the sphere of the fixed stars, all astrologers agree that after forty-nine thousand years the heavens will have gone through all possible configurations, and that this is related to a comment by ibn Ezra regarding the *shemittah* year.

Before concluding his lengthy essay, however, Duran qualifies his explanations. When ibn Ezra is being murky, he writes, there is no way to determine conclusively that a statement reflects his own position, or whether he means only to offer various midrashic elaborations. Sometimes ibn Ezra says one thing in one place and another elsewhere, and sometimes he simply states that there is a secret meaning to a verse, but declines to provide it.

Given these caveats, Duran concludes the essay by averring that he will endeavor to explain ibn Ezra's meaning; but he undertakes the task in an uncharacteristically allusive fashion. He begins with introductory remarks on the connecting "force" that guides the universe, discussed in Chapter 4 above, suggesting that these forces are shaped by the number seven insofar as, in Maimonides' words, that guidance "subsists through the intermediary of heaven."²⁸ His second point, as noted earlier, is that certain people and places are more disposed to

receive divine emanation than others; the commandments inculcate behavior that increases this disposition. And third, the commandments also take into account astrological effects.

In light of these clear principles, one expects a direct explanation of ibn Ezra's obscurities to follow. Instead, as noted, Duran merely points to a number of ibn Ezra's glosses that he claims will provide the proper context and concludes this nonexplanation with "this suffices for sages like you."

In sum, then, the neo-Pythagorean tradition of arithmology, to which this text of Duran's belongs, supports the idea that number is a basic building block of existence. For Duran, the demonstration of a numerical pattern permeating the macrocosm is a sign of the unity of creation. And the particular pattern he finds, centering on the great role played by the number seven, is a Jewish one.

It may be instructive in this connection to observe the use made of a different number by a contemporaneous Christian thinker: the Parisian scholastic Nicole Oresme in his 1382 French astronomical treatise *Le livre du ciel et du monde*. (There can be little question of influence between the two men, one way or the other.)

Oresme emphasizes that "the laws whose purpose is to magnify the Creator are related to the number three," so that "the trinity is a natural component of things and creatures."²⁹ The idea derives originally from Aristotle's *On the Heavens*, on which *Le livre du ciel et du monde* is a commentary. Aristotle notes: "Hence it is that we have taken this number [three] from nature, as it were one of her laws, and make use of it even for the worship of the gods."³⁰ In an interpretation that in many ways parallels Duran's own, Oresme notes:

Even according to Aristotle's philosophy, all things are preserved and kept in existence by the influence of God, as, for example, light is continually maintained by the sun. Therefore, of necessity, the trinity mentioned above is found in every creature, *qua* creature. And because everything made must have and does have the likeness of its Maker or the likeness of that which is in the thought of its Maker, this is a clear sign that trinity is in God in accordance with His infinite divine power. . . .

This is the reason that the Creator wishes to be praised in accordance with this number three; and Nature, in which the form, the vestige, or trace of God is refulgent, teaches us this.³¹

The divine light imagined here permeates the creatures of this world and imbues them with threeness.

Sefer melakhim, in its discussion of the number three, and citing the same line from Aristotle,³² makes its own lengthy argument for three being the expression of God in the world, even going so far as to read the seven spheres as really being three in essence.³³ Duran, while drawing some lines from that section, pointedly avoids these particular passages, no doubt precisely because of his awareness of the polemical issue at stake. For him, the divine number reflected in the created world cannot be three.³⁴ Rather, his is precisely the opposing point: seven, in fact, is the form of God in the world.

Oresme himself continues in a rather uncharacteristically polemical vein, arguing that the threefold nature of the world, reflecting the threefold nature of the Christian God, was not only understood by ancient philosophers like Aristotle but was itself incorporated into the Hebrew Bible, where it served as a foreshadowing of the truth of Christianity: "We must necessarily assume that God, who is the exemplar of creatures, possesses in Himself incorporeal trinity, for it is impossible that the divine substance should be corporeal in and of itself. And this trinity of God, which nature demonstrates to us, was perceived formerly in natural light by many solemn philosophers, although it was obscurely seen, as one sees a thing from a distance. The holy patriarchs and the prophets knew it by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but did not explain it to us clearly, but in figurative language and obscure words."³⁵

For Oresme, the Bible expresses Christian truth; Duran, in his essay, asserts otherwise. The question that initially spurred his essay and thus frames his discussion is why the number seven is so common in the Hebrew Bible. By illustrating the properties and ubiquity of this number both in nature and in Scripture, he enters a claim for the divine truth inherent in the Bible of the Jews. As the heavens are both the handiwork of God and the means by which he manages the world, and as they are patterned according to the hebdomad, so are his creation and his management concretely expressed in the same numerical pattern. The Torah, too, is his creation, and by means of it as well, God continuously governs and flows out to the world.

Number is not the only source Duran finds critical for seeing the divine patterns in the cosmos. Words, too—Hebrew words—provide a key, and in a very similar fashion.

As we've seen, God created the cosmos in such a way that the number seven, in particular, plays a central role in the numerical pattern of creation, testifying by its presence in the Bible to the Creator himself. In *Ma'aseh Efod* (1403), to which I turn at greater length in the next part, language performs a similar function. For Duran, Hebrew alone of all languages is “natural,” in that the words reflect the natures of the things to which they refer.³⁶ To put it more precisely, the Hebrew language and its letters correspond uniquely to the underlying created reality of this world.

Duran defines language in general as “a collection of all of the individual, solely human sounds that, for each and every people, indicate existing subjects by convention.”³⁷ However, he explicitly excludes Hebrew from this universal definition. After all, he points out in *Ma'aseh Efod*, Hebrew is the “language in which the Lord spoke to His prophets and the created sounds from which the speech during [the revelation at Sinai] was prepared.” These, then, are hardly “solely human sounds.”³⁸ Instead, Hebrew is the language created by God in such a way as to reflect the reality of his created world. It is the most perfect and rational of languages: not only do “its roots and principles agree with the natures of existent things, both substances and accidents,” but it possesses “superiority over the rest of the languages” thanks to the “perfection of its Creator and the One who brought it into existence.”³⁹

Among the examples of this perfection mentioned by Duran are the following.⁴⁰ First, verbs in Hebrew, as opposed to those in either Greek or Latin, differentiate between male and female.⁴¹ Second, Hebrew “distinguishes in function between existents which are distinguished in nature.”⁴² Third, the division of verb forms into *binyanim* “agrees with nature,”⁴³ whereas verbs in other languages—again he invokes Greek and Latin—are divided by “usage” only.⁴⁴ Then, too, some particular words in Hebrew reflect aspects of the physical reality of their referents. Take, for example, the word *shamayim* (heavens). Two ideas are embodied in this important word, writes Duran: the dual ending “indicates twoness,” while the central unit, *sham* (“there”), “indicates a fixed place.”⁴⁵ In this way the word appears to allude to

the nature of the heavenly orbs, which move constantly, never pausing in place—except at their two fixed poles.

Duran appears here to be reworking for his own purposes a passage from Abraham ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Shem*.⁴⁶ And it is fitting that, with his cosmological interests and implicitly polemical intent, he should choose to elaborate on the Hebrew word for heavens. For like the structural correspondence between the heavens and the Bible in the essay on the hebdomad, there is a theory, described by Duran in *Ma'aseh Efod*, that depends on a correspondence between the heavens and language.

According to that theory, attributed by Duran to astrologers, "some letters are particular to one star and some to another star, and in this way all the letters are associated with the seven rulers [planets]." ⁴⁷ Since the letters are "influenced" by the planets,⁴⁸ the sounds signified by the letters are also influenced by the celestial bodies.⁴⁹ As proof, Duran mentions the early rabbis who asserted that there were miracles done by means of "names," by which is probably meant the mystical names of God, and that "some of these sounds achieve a wondrous impression on existent things," a fact attributed to "to the philosopher [Aristotle] in the book *Takhlit he-hakham*."⁵⁰

Duran rejects the application of this principle to every language,⁵¹ but, given the discussion above, might conceivably endorse it with regard specifically to a cosmological correspondence between the seven planets and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. That the number seven is reflected in the heavenly structure is clear. That the heavenly structure influences the sublunar world is also clear. Since Hebrew uniquely reflects the nature and structure of the cosmos, it is reasonable to conclude that Hebrew, the language of the Jewish Scriptures, manifests a relation and correspondence with the seven planets and perhaps even with the zodiacal constellations, the work of God's hands.

Kalman Bland has suggested that Duran's emphasis in *Ma'aseh Efod* on the commissioning and owning of lavishly decorated and illuminated manuscripts of the Bible was part of a wider attempt at the reconstruction of Jewish national and religious pride in the aftermath of 1391.⁵² Similarly, the numerological, the grammatical, and the astrological elements in Duran's thought can be seen as responses to

the insistent assertions of Christian mastery of the secrets of the natural world and of human speech.

As I have traced it in this chapter, Duran's impulse to draw together the different strata of "existents" into isomorphic matching classes, and his sense of the power of number to map the world and of language to give expression to ultimate reality, converge with his polemically based sensitivity to the enduring claims of the Jewish faith. Even in a mathematically technical work like his essay on the hebdomad, or a linguistically technical work like *Ma'aseh Efod*, his essay on Hebrew grammar, that convergence is inescapable.

Astronomy and Jewish Identity

Heshev ha-Efod

In 1395, Duran composed a brief treatise on the Jewish calendar titled *Heshev ha-Efod* (“Cincture of the Efod”).¹ At first glance, its purpose would appear obvious and immediate. In the turmoil of the early 1390s in Catalonia, the Jewish communities, with many of their number dead or lost to Judaism, were faced with the need to fulfill a basic requirement of communal religious life: namely, setting the dates of the holidays and fasts of the coming religious year.

It is unclear to whom this task would have fallen even in ordinary times. Certain authorities must have issued *luhot*, tables of the new moons and holidays, and presumably these authorities were the council or local governing body of *berurim* (elders)—but even in peaceful times such councils did not usually include experts in the art of applying the calendrical rules.² After 1391, some communities were in complete disarray, along with their councils.³ In these circumstances, Profayt Duran may well have been prompted to provide a short handbook on a subject of first importance to the surviving remnants.

Yet this explanation leaves one unsatisfied. There was already a plethora of writings on the Jewish calendar, including *Sefer ha-‘Ibbur* of Abraham bar Hiyya from the early twelfth century and a short treatise with the same title by Abraham ibn Ezra, as well as the Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*.⁴ To all three of these works Duran alludes explicitly in his introduction.⁵ He also mentions another source, Zerahyah ha-Levi of Girona, whose twelfth-century commentary on Isaac Alfasi (*Sefer ha-ma’or*) includes a thorough discussion of the calendar. Besides, the

basic rules of the calendar are, as Maimonides points out, so elementary that a child can learn them in a couple of days.⁶ And not only are those rules essentially simple, they are clearly set out in the *Mishneh Torah*, hardly a rare or obscure text, not to mention the other works noted above.

Surely more than composing another manual was involved for Duran in embarking on this project. He does indeed present the rules—as did Shimon ben Tzemaḥ Duran soon after 1391 in his own treatise *Tiferet Israel*—but he also takes pains to include in the first half of *Heshev ha-Efod* a certain amount of (highly abbreviated) spherical geometry and a discussion of the epicyclic system. Following this material on the astronomical concepts and mathematical techniques needed to understand the theoretical basis of the calendar, he proceeds in the second half to its laws, the rules for setting the dates of the holidays, details of computation, and explanations of discrepancies and other peculiar aspects of the system.

The larger purpose of this enterprise emerges from an examination of its text and its method. *Heshev ha-Efod* is a succinct work: an introduction that includes chapter headings as a kind of table of contents, followed by twenty-nine short chapters and a few tables. Duran's approach throughout is highly methodical.

In the first chapter, which offers a simple, careful explanation of preliminary terms, Duran defines, among other things, the diurnal sphere, the poles of the world, north, south, the horizon, east, west, the terrestrial climes, the sphere of the zodiac, the constellations, and so on. The second chapter discusses the extent of the inhabited portion of the earth and the longitude of Jerusalem. (The Jewish calendar is based on visibility conditions at Jerusalem.) In the third through sixth chapters, he treats the question of eccentric or epicyclic models for the sun and moon and their corrections—he favors an epicyclic model for both sun and moon—while chapters seven and eight are devoted to the true and median conjunctions of the sun and moon, which define the beginning of the month. The ninth chapter concerns the definition of the day used in the Jewish calendar and the significance of the difference between the true and median motion of the sun and moon. The tenth chapter, the longest in the work, deals (non-technically) with the question of how distant the sun and moon must be from each other for the new moon to be sighted—a subject covered in great sophistication and detail in the second part of Maimonides' Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon—and the importance

of this for understanding a problematic rabbinic statement in Rosh Hashanah 20b, to which we shall return.

Chapter 11 begins the calendrical material in earnest, covering the fact that in order to keep the lunar and solar years aligned, the system must be based on the intercalation of seven months in a nineteen-year cycle. The calendrical terminology of “perfect,” “regular,” and “deficient” years and the intercalation of extra days into Marḥeshvan and Kislev are the subjects of the next chapter, while the adjustments of the holidays (the *deḥiyyot*), including the law of the *molad zaqen* (see below), are covered in chapters 13 through 16. The signs of the years and their dependence on the *molad* fill the next three chapters. Two peculiar details of the calendar are discussed in chapters 20 and 21. The intricacies of determining the *molad* and the tables needed for calculating it are found in chapters 22 and 23, the latter of which is composed in verse.⁷

A little background will be useful in the case of the following three chapters. In the biblical and Talmudic periods, leap years appear to have been inserted on an *ad hoc*, yearly basis, depending on the observation of such natural phenomena as the ripening of fruits or the time of the equinoxes (called *tequfot*). Hai Gaon, in a *responsum* quoted by Avraham bar Ḥiyya, cites a *beraita* from Sanhedrin 11b—“For three signs one intercalates the year: for the *aviv*, and for the *tequfah*, and for the fruits of the trees”—and adds, “and these three watch over the agreement between the solar year and the lunar year.” It seems that spring (*aviv*) had to be far enough advanced to produce first fruits at an appropriate time. Practically speaking, this meant that when the vernal equinox was scheduled to fall after the sixteenth of Nisan, a leap year was declared. Both the equinox itself and the median time between equinoxes (and therefore, by extension, the length of the year) are called *tequfot*. Chapters 24 through 26 concern the difference between the *tequfah* (in the second sense) of Mar Shmuel and the *tequfah* of Rav Ada bar Ahavah and the calculations and tables for them.

The twenty-seventh chapter is on the *shemittah* years and the jubilees. Offering a mathematical formula for calculating whether a particular year is a *shemittah* year or not, Duran goes into the various traditional opinions regarding the timing of the jubilee year before and after the Babylonian exile, and concludes by explaining Jewish, Christian, and Muslim methods of counting years, with a very brief run-through of the highlights of history (such as the Flood, the

Exodus, the birth of Jesus, the destructions of the Temple, and the beginning of the Muslim era) and their dates according to the Jewish calendar. The twenty-eighth chapter is on the Christian calculation of Easter (“their Passover”). The twenty-ninth and final chapter is on fixing the beginnings of months and the weekly Bible readings.

As noted, the astronomical and calendrical material in *Heshev ha-Efod* is presented in a highly systematic manner. Duran carefully orders his terms and definitions so that his explanations of the laws and their difficulties, when he reaches them, will be meaningful to the reader, taking into account both logical considerations and, always, the needs of the student. Thus, declining to begin by plunging into calendrical terms per se, he deals first with the application of spherical geometry to the case of the earth and the solar system. Here is his first definition of the poles of a sphere: “When one imagines a straight line passing through the center of a particular sphere rotating around itself, such that the two ends reach the surface of the sphere, and the line does not move when the sphere moves, then the ends of that line are called the poles of the sphere.” Compare his careful listing of definitions and meticulously arranged progression of material with the jumble in Abraham ibn Ezra’s *Sefer ha-Ibbur*: “Chapter one: on the *mean conjunctions* and on their estimation and on the fixing [of the holidays] and the Bible readings and on *tequfat Shmuel* and *rav Ada* and the calculation of the gentiles; Chapter two: on the reasons for everything, written in one order, and the secret of intercalation; Chapter three: on the true equinox and on the true conjunction of the luminaries and when the moon will be seen in every city, eastern and western and northern, and when the moon and the sun will be eclipsed and how much it is darkened, from the diagonal and from the center and the measure of the time of the eclipse.”⁸

I mentioned that Duran invokes by name three preceding major works on the calendar: Maimonides’ *Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon*, Abraham bar Hiyya’s *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, and Abraham ibn Ezra’s *Sefer ha-Ibbur*. Each provides the laws of the calendar in their entirety, yet each is somehow unsatisfactory. Duran’s complaints about them offer a glimpse into just what he thinks is significant about his own work:

Since some of the early sages composed a treatise [on the subject] entirely devoid of causes, as [Maimonides] did in the *Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon*, and some of them included proximate causes only [even though] some of those causes are feeble, as

will be seen, as the sages [Abraham bar Hiyya] ha-Nasi and [Abraham] ibn Ezra did in their [works on] *Sod ha-'Ibbur*, therefore I was besought by some of my loving brothers to write this short treatise encompassing all that the early sages spoke about at length, regarding what is necessary for this knowledge during this continuing exile, giving [both] the proximate and the remote causes, for this is the perfect and true knowledge in everything.⁹

Two points immediately emerge. First, in the Aristotelian logical system, perfect knowledge of a thing is achieved only by knowing its causes, not just the fact of its existence. Thus, the rules are not enough. A “perfect and true knowledge” of the Jewish calendar can be imparted only by including both proximate and remote causes. Whereas some earlier writers were concerned only with how to calculate the holidays, actually to know the science of the calendar requires that you come to know the motions of the sun and moon (the remote causes) and how they produce the months and the seasons (the proximate causes). Only in that way can you understand how the laws of the Jewish calendar are calculated to reflect and respond to celestial movements. In short, what Duran is attempting to describe is a calendrical *science*.

Second, a practically useful work must be brief. This can be achieved by concision and relevance. Concerning the latter, Duran emphasizes his intention to include only what is useful in the exile, which dispenses with the need for a technical treatment of the sighting of the new moon. Here Duran seems to be referring to the entire second part of the Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon, in which Maimonides gives a highly sophisticated method of calculating when it is possible to observe the new moon crescent (*phasis*), something theoretically necessary only when the people of Israel are sovereign in the Holy Land and the rabbinical court must verify the testimony of eyewitnesses.

As for concision, Duran’s approach is straightforward and parsimonious. Take, for example, his decidedly schematic view of the known world, confined to “the inhabited portion of the earth and the longitude of Jerusalem”¹⁰—that is, the two elements needed for calendrical calculations. In fact, Duran does not include a summary description of the overall structure of the cosmos, nor does he even specify that the earth and the universe are spherical, a basic fact that nearly always appears explicitly in more strictly astronomical works. Nor does he touch on the nature of the celestial bodies.

An important element in understanding this work is that, when compared with Duran's other astronomical and scientific writings, *Heshev ha-Efod* is striking in its thoroughly Jewish flavor. Aristotle appears not at all in its pages; even Ptolemy, though quoted in connection with certain early observations, is not much in evidence. On the other hand, Jewish authorities like Abraham ibn Ezra, Zerahyah ha-Levi, Judah Halevi, and even figures from the Talmud like Zera and Hillel appear regularly. The entire book is suffused with a concern for the authority of the Talmud that one can hardly detect elsewhere in Duran's scientific output. The resolution of difficult Talmudic passages takes a central role, as does the support of *halakhah* by means of physics, philosophy, and mathematics. This forms a particular contrast to a work like his essay on the equation of time (*Hilluf ha-yamim ve-ha-leilot*) or his scientific commentaries, which cover their subjects without a thought for proofs from the Talmud.

For example, in chapter fifteen, Duran explains the postponement (*dehiyyah*) of the *molad zaqen* and the reason for it.¹¹ He rightly points out that this is a problematic *halakhah*. The postponement of the *molad zaqen* is one of four conditions that govern when Rosh Hashanah must be postponed for a day (or sometimes two) from the day on which it is calculated to fall, or was observed to fall according to the sighting of the new crescent. The first condition (usually denoted *lo adu rosh*) specifies the days of the week on which Rosh Hashanah is not permitted to fall, namely, the first, fourth, or sixth day (Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday [ADU = 1, 4, 6]). This practical measure relieves the community of the burden of back-to-back holidays, such as Yom Kippur falling on the day before or after the Sabbath; it is thus independent of any astronomical factor. The second condition, called the rule of the *molad zaqen*, restricts the times of the day when the mean conjunction (*molad*) may occur. If the mean conjunction is calculated to take place after eighteen hours (noon, counting from 6 p.m. the previous day), then the declaration of the new month is postponed by a day. The third and fourth conditions, which need not detain us, follow from the first two.

The rule of the *molad zaqen* is connected with an enigmatic statement found in b. Rosh Hashanah 20b: "*nolad qodem hatzot be-yadua' she-nir'eh samukh le-shqi'at ha-hamah, lo nolad qodem hatzot be-yadua' she-lo nir'eh samukh le-shqi'at ha-hamah.*" (If "it"—the moon, presumably—is born before noon, it can be assumed that it will be seen near the setting of the sun; if it is not born before noon,

it can be assumed that it will not be seen near the setting of the sun.) The rule seems to be an old one, but how it emerged from, or is related to, a system dependent on the direct sighting of the new moon is still poorly understood.¹² In this reading, the term *nolad* in the Talmudic text is assumed to refer to the technical term *molad*, or conjunction, and what is being seen (*nir'eh*) is considered to be the *phasis*—the new crescent. That is to say, if the conjunction of the moon and the sun takes place before noon, then it will supposedly be possible to see the new crescent moon that very evening, and so that day should be designated as the beginning of the new month. If the conjunction takes place after noon, then the crescent will not be visible that evening.

This reading, however, does not take into account the fact that there are two conjunctions—the true and the median—to which the term might refer, a fact that gave rise to fundamental difficulties in interpreting the Talmudic rule. If the conjunction is considered in this context to be the *true* conjunction (when the sun and the moon as physical bodies can be found in the same celestial longitude), then the text makes no sense, for at the moment of the true conjunction, and for much more than six hours afterward, it would be impossible to see anything of the moon; indeed, a true conjunction can precede the time when the moon is first visible by twenty to fifty hours.¹³ But if the *molad* is taken in its usual medieval sense as the *median* conjunction—that is, an average of the true conjunctions—its relation to the visibility of the moon would be very rough indeed, as the median conjunction can occur long before or after the true conjunction.

Duran's explanation neatly takes into account both these potential problems. At the time of Tishri (the only month that matters as far as the calendar is concerned), the true conjunction can, in his reckoning, precede the median conjunction by at most thirteen and a half hours and can precede visibility of the moon by no less than twenty-four hours. Therefore, if the true conjunction occurs at sunset marking the beginning of day one (counting days from sunset to sunset), then the median conjunction will take place, at the latest, at one and a half hours past daybreak on day one and visibility of the moon will take place at sunset of day two.

All of this, Duran writes, applies at the so-called edge of the west, where the time is four and a half hours off from the time in Jerusalem. Therefore, if in the west the median conjunction is to be no later than one and a half hours after dawn on day one, then in Jerusalem the median conjunction is to be no later than noon (four and a half hours

later, the sixth hour after dawn). In short, *nolad* (“it is born”) refers to the median conjunction; *qodem hatzot* (“before noon”) means before noon in Jerusalem; and *she-nir’eh samukh le-shqi’at ha-ḥamah* (“that it is seen close to sunset”) means that the moon will be seen close to sunset *at the edge of the west*. The median conjunction must occur before noon in Jerusalem, to ensure that the moon will actually be visible that evening at some place in the inhabited world.

To a point, Duran’s ingenious explanation is similar to that found in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*, where the discussion is spurred by a question of the Khazar king: “Does not the beginning of the fixing of the days occur in China, because it is the eastern beginning of the inhabited [portion of the earth]?”¹⁴ Disagreeing, Halevi’s spokesman argues that the beginning of the Sabbath must be calculated from when the sun descends behind Mount Sinai; in the east, it begins eighteen hours later than in Israel, which is the center of the world. Halevi’s spokesman then adduces our rabbinic statement from RH 20b:

Therefore the [rabbis] said: *if the conjunction takes place before noon, it is understood that the new moon is visible at sunset*, as though to say, if the conjunction takes place before noon on the Sabbath in Jerusalem, it is understood that the new moon is visible on the Sabbath close to sunset. This is because the designation “Sabbath” continues for eighteen hours after the end of the designation of the place at the beginning, until the sun returns to the zenith over Israel after a day and a night. The new moon begins to be visible to people in the east of Israel in the evening of the Sabbath. This agrees with what the rabbis said: *a night and a day are reckoned to the month*. The designation “Sabbath” has left the inhabited [portion of the earth] and Sunday has begun, even though for the inhabitants of the land of Israel the Sabbath is over and it is Sunday, for indeed the intention was that the “seventh day” should include all the inhabited [portion of the earth], so that if you said to someone in China and someone in the west, “on what day did you fix the new year?” the answer would be “on the Sabbath.”¹⁵

Halevi’s explanation of the halakhic rule was adopted by others, notably Zerahyah ha-Levi in his commentary on Alfasi, *ha-Ma’or ha-Qatan*. For his part, Abraham bar Hiyya, though he dilates at great length on the question, attributes the formulation of the rule to the need to delineate which witnesses—coming from, say, Damascus—would have been able to see the new moon.¹⁶

Duran rejects all such approaches as incomplete. For a new-moon day to be declared in Jerusalem, he reminds us, the median

conjunction must occur there before the hour of noon. And then he brings into consideration the second rabbinic dictum found in b. Rosh Hashanah 20b: “*a night and a day are reckoned to the month.*” What this means, in Duran’s interpretation, is that there will be at least one place in the inhabited world (in this case, the edge of the west) where the *true* conjunction will have taken place at the very beginning of that day (i.e., at sunset) such that both the night *and* the day will belong to the coming month.

This incorporation of the true conjunction into the laws of the calendar is unusual, as Duran is well aware. But as he notes, neither Judah Halevi, who also cites the second rabbinic dictum, nor Zerahyah ha-Levi had bothered to address the legally problematic position in which their own explanation left a portion of the inhabitants of the world. And he expresses amazement at the fact that their reading of the law should have omitted the question of the true conjunction altogether.

It is this issue, in fact, that seems to engage Duran most intensely. As noted in Chapter 1, one of Duran’s very few glosses on the *Kuzari* reads, in referring to this discussion about the calendar, “[The passage beginning at] 19 is to explain a hidden matter that should properly have a treatise of its own devoted to it.”¹⁷ If, as seems reasonable, the section of the *Kuzari* dealing with this particular question was what initially drove Duran to write *Heshev ha-Efod*, the question becomes even more pointed. Why? What about this particular issue was so important?

What was at stake for Duran, I would suggest, was the *astronomical* accuracy of the Jewish calendar. In his reading of the rule of the *molad zaqen*, the rabbinic authors were no less cognizant of the true motions of the heavens than was Ptolemy, the most highly regarded astronomer of the time and one whose measurements Duran quotes as confirmation of his own reading. As he notes in *Ma’aseh Efod*, “it is certain that the sages of Israel were expert in all [the sciences], as we see from what they wrote of astronomy.”¹⁸ For Duran, I would argue, proof of the rabbis’ expertise lies in their putative incorporation of the calculation of the *true* conjunction into their halakhic rulings. As if to underline the importance of this matter to Duran, the relation of the true conjunction to the median was also, as we saw in Chapter 2, the subject of a separate letter by him to Shealtiel Gracian.

One last point about *Heshev ha-Efod*: polemical as it is, it also includes vital information about the motion of the planets, the sun

and moon, and their relations to each other, equipping the reader with a fundamental understanding of the workings of the universe. This is worthy and essential in and of itself. But in addition, these basics of astronomical knowledge will allow the reader to apprehend, to some limited extent, the divine governance of the world through the celestial emanation and motion. In his introduction to this work Duran alludes to Maimonides' parable of the palace, in which studying the sciences is held to lead one closer and closer to God. For Duran, the study of the calendar is religiously beneficial both in what it imparts about the heavens, the work of God's hands, and in what it imparts about Jewish law.

To sum up: Duran's *Heshev ha-Efod* is a treatise on the Jewish calendar that equips its readers with three curricular elements: a tool for calculating Jewish holidays (particularly helpful for a *converso* community without organized leadership—or even for what remained of the scattered Jewish communities); a demonstration of the Jewish astronomical heritage as a rational and reliable system; and elementary information, both intellectually perfecting and religiously necessary, concerning the motion of the heavenly bodies.

The Second Temple rabbis who developed the calendar represent for Duran the peak of Jewish scientific achievement. And not just for Duran: that these early rabbis commanded a highly sophisticated astronomy was a recurrent claim of the medieval period. An important characteristic of *Heshev ha-Efod* is thus its interest in reconciling rabbinic sayings with current astronomical knowledge by providing a scientific rationale for those of their calendrical *halakhot* that might otherwise appear irrational. To that extent, the work may be seen as an effort at shoring up the confidence of the Jewish communities in their own rationalist traditions.

Examining a wide range of time periods, cultural orientations, and locales, Bernard R. Goldstein concludes that, of all the sciences, astronomy held the most powerful and consistent attraction for medieval Jewish thinkers. He has also written that it was a “neutral meeting ground for scholars who were sharply divided on religious questions.”¹⁹ To some extent, all the sciences represented spaces where Jews and Christians could meet and collaborate with few inter-religious irritants. In the Islamic world, practically oriented royal

patronage resulted in science and philosophy becoming fields independent of religious authority.²⁰

At the Aragonese court, Jewish and Christian astronomers, physicians, and astrologers worked together, in principle removed from the conflicting claims of religion. This does not mean, however, that either rationalism in general or even astronomy in particular was, for Duran, always entirely divorced from religious truth claims. Christian self-assertion was an integral part of the cultural atmosphere in which he and his class moved. In the broadest sense, Christianity and Christendom claimed God's favor and vigorously asserted the possession of cosmic truth. This claim was expressed in many ways, including in the design and construction of churches, municipal buildings, and—a fourteenth-century craze—public clocks. By the end of the century, indeed, these clocks, often incorporating perpetual calendars and moving replicas of the heavenly spheres and planets, had become standard accoutrements of any self-respecting European city, Perpignan not least among them.²¹ They were an outward emblem of the Christian community's pride in itself, its sense of triumph over the natural world, and its confidence in its rational foundations.

Jewish expertise in astronomy was a similar source of pride to Iberian Jews, and it would seem that the ongoing interest among Iberian and Provençal Jews in establishing rabbinic expertise in astronomy, illustrated dramatically in Duran's *Heshev Ha-Efod*, was stimulated in part by a competitive instinct. Both Duran's essay on the hebdomad, discussed in the previous chapter, and his work on the Jewish calendar illuminate the extent to which the Jewish-Christian polemical dynamic could both drive and inform the intellectual interests of the Jewish rationalist elite. Just as religious or theological questions may spur scientific research, Duran's sophisticated astronomical investigations of the validity of Ptolemy's *Almagest* were closely tied to the theological issues raised by Maimonides in his *Guide of the Perplexed*.

In theory, science and philosophy could represent a truth beyond that of individual religious understandings, even a way of creating common ground between Jews and non-Jews. Yet precisely because they represented a kind of common ground, science and philosophy could also be a locus of competition, even a battleground: a place, especially in the fraught world of late medieval Iberia, where one might appeal to scientific and philosophical truth precisely on behalf of one's own religion.

Rationalist Polemics

Al tehi ka-avotekha

Al tehi ka-avotekha (“Be Not Like Your Fathers”) was composed approximately three years after Duran’s conversion.¹ It takes the form of a satirical epistle to another recent New Christian, one David Bonet Bonjorn, who had converted out of a professedly sincere desire to embrace Christianity.

The “traditional” interpretation of this letter is that it was written by one forced convert (Profayt Duran) to another (Bonjorn) who had begun to look favorably on his new faith.² Yet there is no reference to forcible conversion in the text; Duran cites only a letter in which Bonjorn has expressed his new convictions, and was likely merely responding to Bonjorn’s announcement of *voluntary* conversion. The work attacks the irrationality of Christian dogma and points up the absurdity of a philosophically educated Iberian Jew converting to a religion based on faith. Duran’s letter savages Bonjorn personally for his betrayal of their shared Iberian Jewish values, values expressed in particular through, as Eleazar Gutwirth has written, pride in “lineage and excellence in language and philosophy.”³

Duran’s style—ornate, belletristic, and allusive—recalls that employed by medieval Hebrew literary figures who, among other practices, regularly embedded biblical verses in their texts to create a variety of artful, and often humorously satiric, effects. Aside from its allusive language, to which we shall return, what is immediately striking about *Al tehi ka-avotekha* is the rhetorical masquerade adopted by the speaker. The letter is framed in the form not of an attack but of felicitation to Bonjorn for his decision. But the posture

is just a pose. Every word praising the addressee intends its opposite, and every compliment to the Christian religion is a sly aggression. Mockingly,⁴ Duran begins nearly every section of the letter with the words “be not like your fathers,” the phrase that has come to serve as the work’s title. Externally, the phrase means to encourage Bonjorn, as a New Christian, to persevere in his laudable resolve to repudiate his Jewish forebears; beneath the surface, the message is one of derision and condemnation.

While appearing haphazard in its arguments, the work is actually tightly structured. This is particularly true of the first half, whose major theme is the putative wisdom of Bonjorn’s choice of Christian faith over Jewish reason. Here Duran contrasts belief in the unity and oneness of God with belief in the Trinity, belief in the incorporeality of God with belief in the Incarnation of Jesus, and reliance on philosophical exegesis of the Bible with the mix of literal and fanciful readings that for him make up the substance of Christian interpretation. In brief, within the satirical scheme of the letter, the former set of doctrines and methods of proof are to be deemed inferior because rational, the latter superior because irrational.

Before he gets down to cases, Duran pauses for an extended “critique” of Bonjorn’s Jewish forefathers and their tradition of philosophical and scientific expertise:

Do not be like your fathers who were brought by the principles of Reason ineluctably to the natural, theological, logical, and mathematical axioms, and from these generated theorems according to their kind and on their foundations; in the mountains of reason they built towers with turrets (Song 4:4), they deepened their discussion in the apprehension of the ways of logic and its orders; and in order to distinguish between types of demonstrative syllogism and [those that are] not, they gave a large portion [of their study] to the Eight Books [of Aristotle’s *Organon*]; and to precious mathematics they gave their attention, they said things and revealed secrets for praise and for thanksgiving. From the depths of the sea of the science of number [arithmetic] and geometry they raised up pearls, and on the table of the science of astronomy of the spheres they ate delicacies, on the high mountains of natural science they set up waymarks (Jer. 31:20), and in theology they achieved hidden secrets, gold cannot equal them (Job 28:17), nor sweetmeats. “This is their way in their folly,” (Ps. 49:14) my brother.⁵

Cataloguing the Jews’ attainments in logic, mathematics (arithmetic and geometry), astronomy, physics, and metaphysics, Duran is careful

to preface his recitation with the refrain “Do not be like your fathers,” and to end with, “This is their way in their folly, my brother.” But what lies between those two phrases is a barely concealed hymn of praise that strains against the limits of Duran’s mock-congratulatory mode of address. Indeed, the passage stands out from much of the rest of the letter both in its eloquence and in its flashing disclosure of the speaker’s true attitude.

Following this preface is the main section of the letter’s first half. The sciences, having been enumerated in good Aristotelian order, from logic through metaphysics, are now going to be raised one after another as standards against which to judge Christian dogma, and in particular the doctrine of transubstantiation. First, logic. A logical syllogism is the following: if the father equals God, and God equals the son, then the father equals the son. To reject that equation, as belief in the Trinity seems to require, is a violation of the rules of logic. Next, mathematics—violated in its turn by the need to identify the full-grown body of the “messiah” with the small body of a wafer, or the single body of the messiah with a multitude of wafers. Physics—violated by identifying the stationary celestial body of the messiah with wafers that move, or by the idea that the words of an ordinary priest, sober or drunk, virtuous or wicked, have the power to transform a wafer into the body of the messiah. Metaphysics—violated by the concept that the substance of the body of the messiah can take on the accidents of the wafer (how it looks, tastes, and feels).

For each example, Duran simply states the Christian proposition while only occasionally adducing its rational counterprinciple in Judaism—as if to suggest that the statement itself is self-evidently risible. On one such occasion he focuses on the belief of Bonjorn’s fathers in God’s oneness, citing the words from the *shema*, the fundamental statement of Jewish faith—the Lord is One—and defining those words in terms taken from the Greco-Arabic philosophical tradition: “one” means that there is no compositeness in God, God is the sole member of his species, God is not dependent on any other thing for his existence.

The implied meaning of the lines is that Bonjorn, the new Christian, has come to believe in a God who is no longer One but composite (made up of three persons), multiple in kind (there being three members of the divine species), multiple in relation (the son being causally related to the father, for instance), and multiple in number (there being two others added to a single God). “*Be not like your fathers,*

who believed in God of simple unity only, and utterly negated multiplicity, and erroneously asserted ‘*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*’ (Deut 6:4), and understood from the ‘One’ what is taught about it in the true definition—not One in compositeness or in kind or in relation or in anything added to its number.”⁶ Here Duran’s implicit argument relies on three axioms: (1) there *is* only One God, (2) God’s oneness is properly defined by the philosophical tradition, and (3) according to this definition the central statement of the Jewish faith, the *shema*, is true. With these he can prove that (4) unlike Jewish belief, the Christian belief in a triune deity violates the principles of philosophy.

After this series of rationally structured demonstrations of the irrationality of Christian belief—posed, to repeat, within a framework lauding the *superiority* of irrational belief—Duran turns in the second half of the letter to issues of religious values and practice. Here again Duran provides a short preface that, were it not for the line with which it begins—“do not be like your fathers”—might again be taken as an encomium: in this case, to the Jews’ devotion to Torah as both an object of study and a source of eternal religious law. He lists some of the transgressions of this law in which Bonjorn can now indulge and thereby avoid—in other words, fall into—“shame.” These involve abandoning the laws of circumcision, family purity, and marriage, observance of the Sabbath and the festivals, and the various regulations of kashrut.

Once again, argument here is minimal, as if merely to enumerate the forbidden activities will suffice to evoke revulsion in the reader. The one exception concerns a point central to Duran’s other anti-Christian polemic, *Kelimat ha-goyim*, expressed here as an offhand “doubt” that Jesus himself actually abrogated the law of the Torah; to the contrary, Duran suggests, both he and his disciples were careful to observe the commandments even after baptism. In line with the motif of uncleanness and impurity, Duran also touches on the veneration of saints’ relics, in particular the kissing of human bones.

When it comes to method, Duran’s practice is to construct whole sections out of strings of biblical quotations. Often, however, an awareness of the full context of a particular verse will cast a significant new light on the surface point that the author seems to be making,

sometimes, indeed, radically undermining it. So deft is the humor that it is not always possible, especially at this distance in time, to tell which of several potential readings of a passage the author intends us to understand as his own. Making matters more complicated, and no doubt deliberately so, Duran is apt to switch back and forth from “straight” allusion, in which the full context of a scriptural verse is in fact compatible with the surface meaning of the specific words or phrases being quoted, to allusions in which the unquoted context contradicts or contrapuntally plays off of the outer meaning.

Duran introduces his multivalent and frequently subversive use of quotation at the very outset by addressing his letter to “David, when he changed his demeanor before Avimelekh.”⁷ This, a quotation from Psalm 34:1, is traditionally understood to refer to an episode in 1 Samuel in which the young David feigns madness. Duran is almost certainly implying here that Christianity is itself crazy, but, with a wink to readers other than Bonjorn, he may also be signaling his recognition that many of those who have converted to Christianity have done so only as a pretense.⁸ In any case, this is but the first of several such allusions to a running motif in the letter: namely, the distinction between external action and inner belief, to which I shall return more extensively in Chapter 10.

At one point Duran sneers: “And I saw, my brother, your intention is accepted and your deeds are for the sake of heaven.”⁹ He is echoing Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* and the religious quandary of the king of the Khazars, who receives a dream telling him, “Your intention is accepted, but your deeds are not accepted.” The king has a perfect heart, but devotes himself to the wrong religious observance: a pagan temple and pagan sacrifices.¹⁰ Reading Duran’s words in their inverted sense, we understand him to be asserting that neither Bonjorn’s deeds nor his intentions are acceptable.¹¹ In so doing, Duran highlights Halevi’s differentiation between the external performance of religious rites and the internal adherence to true belief. For Halevi, the Khazar king had to become Jewish in order for his external actions to comport with his inner purity of faith. Here, however, it is not the exterior, but the state of inner belief that is at stake.¹² The same distinction is embodied in Duran’s consciously duplicitous text itself, whose feigned external sense (praise of Christian doctrine) is in direct opposition to its real, inner meaning (the vehement rejection of Christianity).

When placed in the context of religious polemic, issues of quotation become issues of interpretation. In the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries, Iberian Jewish polemicists wrote bitterly about having to trade scriptural proof texts with Christians, with each side accusing the other of corrupting or misunderstanding the text. Haim ibn Musa (1380–1460), for example, warned his fellow Jewish polemicists to rely on quotations from the *Hebrew* Bible only, and in particular only according to the simple meaning.¹³ Devoting the final chapter of *Kelimat ha-goyim* to Jerome's errors of translation, Duran himself would respond to Christian charges that Jews had corrupted the biblical text by analyzing only those verses cited in the Gospels.¹⁴ And here in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in an example of his sensitivity to the polemical resources of the Hebrew language, Duran digresses at one point from discussing the logical impossibilities of the incarnation to address the issue of virgin birth: "Believe that [Jesus] was incarnated in the stomach of a 'maid,' referring in the Hebrew language to a pure virgin, and about which it is taught, they say 'the way of a man with a maid.'¹⁵ . . . The labor was not hard for her,¹⁶ she did not cry out in her labor-pains like a woman with child,¹⁷ pangs did not take hold of her,¹⁸ nor was she in anguish as a woman who gives birth to her first child,¹⁹ and there was in her the contrary of women²⁰ and she became as she was before."²¹

In this passage, Duran refers to the fact that Bonjorn, as a Christian, must believe that Jesus was born to a virgin, an *'almah*—a word that "in the Hebrew language," he says, means virgin. Here he seems to be accepting the Christian translation of the word *'almah* as it appears in Isaiah's famous prophecy ("Behold a virgin shall conceive," 7:14). But the proof text cited by Duran is an obvious polemical rebuttal of any such rendering. It is from Proverbs—"The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid [*'almah*]." In Jewish anti-Christian polemic, this verse, with its unequivocal reference to a man having his way with a young woman, is itself often adduced as demonstrating conclusively that, in using the same word, Isaiah could not possibly have meant that the future redeemer would be born of a virgin.²²

The whole passage also illustrates Duran's rapier-like use of biblical allusion. Piling up no fewer than four scriptural references to the suffering of a woman in childbirth, he then, in contradistinction to this compound biblical testimony to the universal presence of pain in childbearing, asserts of Mary that "there was in her 'the contrary of women'"—namely, that unlike Eve and all her descendants, Mary did

not suffer the pangs of childbirth. But again the scriptural context from Ezekiel hardly corroborates any such claim: "And the contrary of women is in thee from other women, in that thou didst solicit to harlotry and was not solicited." Mary, in short, has just been labeled a harlot, in silent reference to standard anti-Christian accusations that, as a married woman, she covered up an act of adultery by claiming God as the father of her child.

Still another instance of multivalent quotation occurs in the epistle's concluding "blessing": "Let Jesus, the messiah, whom you chose, make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious to thee—he and not another—and give you peace and bless you."²³ The mouth that speaks²⁴ loves you forever, for thou makest thy ways perfect."²⁵ In calling down divine favor upon Bonjorn, Duran invokes the phrasing of the biblical priestly blessing, adding the stipulation that Jesus himself perform the blessing, "and not another," the other presumably being the true God; thus he turns the putative blessing into a curse. The next allusion, "the mouth that speaks," recalls appropriately enough the great moment of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers: "And he fell on his brother Binyamin's neck, and wept; and Binyamin wept on his neck." But this may also be a neat allusion to Duran's own position as a Joseph, one who has taken on the outward appearance of an Egyptian prince but is inwardly faithful to his people and his God. The final biblical citation, "thou makest thy ways perfect," is from Job, a biblical book hardly without its own quotient of sarcasm. Eliphaz asks of Job: "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it any gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" Duran's invocation of the phrase suggests that the "perfect" ways and the "righteousness" of Bonjorn give neither pleasure nor benefit to Duran, let alone to the true God.

A final example: as a new convert, Duran urges, Bonjorn should not take offense when Christians refer to him disparagingly as a "*tevul yom*." A slight knowledge of Jewish law reveals the poignancy of this use of a term whose neutral meaning might be construed simply as "one recently immersed" (i.e., in the baptismal waters). According to the Mishnaic discussion (Toharot) of the laws of purity in Leviticus, if an Israelite became *tamei*, unclean, because of contact with the dead or for some other reason, he was not permitted to offer a sacrifice in the sanctuary or, later, the Temple in Jerusalem. He had to immerse himself in the *mikveh* and at sundown would be considered pure. A *tevul yom* was one who had already immersed but was waiting to

be declared pure. This identification of baptism with Jewish ritual immersion and of the Church with the *miqdash* holds its own bit of daring turn-the-tables humor, but the real sting lies in the mordant implication that, baptism or no, recent converts to Christianity were still considered too “unclean” to enter the church.

In the arguments it advances against Christianity, *Al tehi ka-avotekha* does not diverge from other medieval Hebrew philosophical polemics.²⁶ But it is set apart from these works not only by its specific techniques, preeminently the barbed biblical allusion, but by the genre-driven framework in which those techniques operate to utmost effect. It is a work not of philosophy but of sarcasm, pitched at a high level and sustained over an entire work.

Or at least sarcasm is the term we would employ today. To medieval rhetoricians, *sarcasmos* was generally characterized as direct “derision of the harshest kind.”²⁷ By contrast, they would have considered Duran’s work, which is anything but direct, to be a classic type of irony.²⁸ Dennis Green, in his study of this latter form in the medieval romance, defines its modern understanding as “a statement, or presentation of an action or situation, in which the real or intended meaning conveyed to the initiated intentionally diverges from, and is incongruous with, the apparent or pretended meaning presented to the uninitiated.”²⁹ In Duran’s time, the term was far more narrowly defined. In medieval irony, the intended meaning could not just “diverge” from the stated meaning; rather, it was the opposite of the stated meaning.³⁰ As recent scholarship has shown, irony was used predominantly “as a vehicle of mockery,”³¹ and its model form was “criticism through feigned praise.”³²

This is precisely how Duran’s letter works. So far as I know, it is almost unique in medieval Hebrew for its nearly perfectly consistent pose of praise intended to convey contempt. Its closest parallel may be the letter composed by Solomon ha-Levi of Burgos before his own conversion, implicitly complaining—through skillful use of biblical and Talmudic allusions—about the lack of kosher wine to drink at court.³³ Another and perhaps even more obvious parallel is a polemical letter in rhymed prose from Solomon Bonafed to the convert Francesc de Sant Jordí, composed later than and clearly indebted to *Al tehi ka-avotekha*.³⁴ Bonafed had a pronounced taste for satire, and

in his letter he draws on Duran's style and language. But although he clearly understood Duran's intention and appreciated his biting style, Bonafed does not follow Duran's example: instead of employing the disguised, ironic form throughout, he states his true meaning explicitly at the outset.³⁵

As the reference to Bonafed suggests, and as noted in Chapter 1, *Al tehi ka-avotekha* was not the only Hebrew polemical letter exchanged between Jews and converts to Christianity around the turn of the fifteenth century in Christian Iberia.³⁶ Nor were such letters meant solely for the eyes of the addressee. Instead, they served as part of an ongoing, quasi-public debate over the validity of the respective religious traditions. While formally addressed to an adversary, they are often thought to have been sent as well to high-placed Jewish officials. Additional copies were presumably perused by individuals, sometimes read aloud in synagogues, and perhaps discussed in the marketplace. Indeed, Duran's letter makes some textual references to the letter sent by Joshua ha-Lorqi to the converted Solomon ha-Levi of Burgos, a letter mentioned by Haim ibn Musa as well.³⁷ This suggests that Duran expected not only that his readers might be familiar with ha-Lorqi's letter but that his own letter would become similarly known. And so it was, as the use Bonafed made of it suggests.

The existence of this semipublic epistolary debate meant that Duran, in writing, had his eye not only on the sincere New Christian whom he addressed but also on the Jewish community that would shortly constitute its larger audience, a community that might include *insincere conversos* as well. Judging from the number of extant copies, *Al tehi ka-avotekha* was relatively popular, and it is likely that in this popularity its satirical humor played a large role.³⁸ Mobilizing rhetoric and mocking allusion in the service of polemical firepower, the allusive wit functions to draw an audience together, implicitly identifying those, whether formally converted or not, who can smile at the in-jokes as members of a single cultural community.

The subtext (or intertext, to be precise) of *Al tehi ka-avotekha* was open to those with an excellent knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, some awareness of the polemical tradition of interpretation of the Bible, some Talmud, and some familiarity with Jewish law. These are the cultural identifiers to which Profayt Duran appeals. Later, Duran would compose *Ma'aseh Efod*, a treatise on Hebrew grammar, precisely, he explains, to enable Jews to understand their own Scriptures according to the truth of the language, and to protect themselves

from the erroneous interpretations of anti-Jewish polemicists, especially former Jews. To Duran, true knowledge of and devotion to the Hebrew Scriptures were unfailing signals of Jewish identity; in his judgment, they even provided a path to salvation.

There may also be a wider literary context to consider. The mocking, derisive, ironic letter that praises in order to condemn would become especially popular among Christians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, presumably thanks in part to the rediscovery by Renaissance humanists of ancient and late-antique satires in Greek and Latin.³⁹ But the form was not without precedent in fourteenth-century European literature as well.⁴⁰

In 1381, there circulated in Paris a Latin letter purporting to be from the devil congratulating his disciples on earth, “the prelates of the church,” for perpetuating the schism that saw one pope ruling the church from Rome and another from Avignon.⁴¹ The diabolical speaker is “Leviathan,” who opens his address to the prelates of the church with a short historical overview of his own reign and subsequent overthrow, written in a quasi-allegorical mode and picturing the world or church as a city (Jerusalem) and Christians as citizens of that city.

Leviathan, often interpreted by medieval Christian exegetes as a demon, or satanic figure, here plays Satan himself, who has happily set up an earthly kingdom of Babylon when the seductive son of a carpenter comes along and invades the realm, establishing his own city of Jerusalem. Jesus’ army is led by a captain of the guards, Peter, and with him on the walls is Paul, who, it is noted innocently, has specifically warned against schisms within the church. In the words of the author, quoting 1 Corinthians: “*solliciti sitis servare unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis, ut in id ipsum dicatis omnes et jam non sint in vobis scismata*” (“be careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. See that you all speak the same thing and that there be no schisms among you”). Ever since then, Leviathan has been hoping to sow strife. And now that the prelates of the church have failed to follow proper procedure, the whole city has been thrown “into turmoil.”

To Leviathan, the letter goes on, the rivalry between followers of Urban and followers of Clement is cause for rejoicing, except for one potential problem: the crawling rats and croaking frogs who call

for a general council. Those “base men,” presumably of low family, are “contemptible in the eyes of the world.” Leviathan concludes by recalling the “first schism” in which he himself rebelled and fell from the ranks of the angels. A final, intense peroration to his prelates completes the letter.

Although the authorship of this letter has been disputed, it is most commonly attributed to Pierre d’Ailly, active in the conciliarist movement to resolve the schism between Rome and Avignon. The similarities between it and Profayt Duran’s epistle are numerous. Both clearly fall into the medieval category of “ironia”⁴² in which, as noted, statements are intended to convey the opposite of their surface meaning. Both combine narratives of history and recent events with praise of and blessings on the addressee(s) as well as extensive exhortation in the second person. The unspoken purpose of each is to demonstrate the grave error committed by the addressee/s, and to this end both employ humorous, allusive language, direct quotation of scriptural proof texts, and rational argument.

Had Duran heard of d’Ailly’s satiric Latin letter? It is certainly conceivable: many ties connected the Jews of Perpignan with France, and as a *familiar* of the royal court in Perpignan, Duran was close to the Provençal world where the letter may have circulated. Knowing Latin, he could even have read d’Ailly’s epistle and admired its rhetorical power. Not that he needed an actual example before him—for the form, as mentioned, is well attested in medieval Latin rhetoric.

Duran’s use of biblical quotation is itself far from straightforward, as we have seen. Within any given mosaic of scriptural allusions, the reader must be exceptionally alert to the one or two that harbor the crucial sting. It is perhaps because of the resultant possibility of being misunderstood, a common pitfall of sustained irony,⁴³ that Duran sometimes feels compelled to come out from behind his linguistic shield and expose the gleam of his sword. In general, though, he operates through cunning indirection and in an assured reliance on the high cultural abilities of his addressee and of his wider Jewish and *converso* audience both to follow the drift of his meaning and to relish the artfulness of his pen.

Even within his own circle, Duran’s letter stands out in these same respects. This we saw in comparing it with the rhymed prose imitation

by Solomon Bonafed, who does not pretend to conceal his derisive purpose. But then, unlike Profayt Duran, Bonafed was not living as a Christian, and in abusing the Christian religion he had far less to fear. And this circumstance brings us to a perhaps more relevant context in which to place *Al tehi ka-avotekha*. For neither the rhetorical strategy nor the bitter tone of this letter can finally be understood without attention to the very particular situation of *conversos* at the turn of the fifteenth century.

Strictly speaking, *Al tehi ka-avotekha* is not, or at least has not been taken as, an example of “*converso* literature,” a term usually applied by scholars to works written in the vernacular rather than in Hebrew. Although the debate over this literature cannot be fully reviewed here, a common, albeit not universal, definition of a “*converso*” text is one that presupposes a dual audience: the uninitiated (Christian) reader, who understands only the surface meaning, and the initiated reader, Jew or *converso*, who understands the text on two radically different levels. The extent to which Duran’s letter, though written in Hebrew, shares many of the literary strategies of vernacular *converso* literature is unmistakable.

Then, too, Duran’s letter partakes of at least one of the salient purposes of much *converso* literature, namely, in the words of one scholar, “affirming Jewishness in crafty writing.”⁴⁴ Moreover, as Eleazar Gutwirth has pointed out in connection with Duran, such crafty writing often assumes the specific form of “a type of humor which excluded Old Christians and was a linking factor to the *conversos*’ Jewish origin. Stylistically this humor hovers between sarcasm and irony.”⁴⁵

Finally, in deploying biblical allusion as a very particular means of conveying his subversive message, Duran was once again in conformity with *converso* norms. Gutwirth cites Inquisition archives from 1489 in which a *converso* and a Jew are reported to have been overheard discussing a Christian religious painting.⁴⁶ The *converso* quotes a phrase from Psalm 115 whose surface meaning is complimentary but whose original biblical context turns the compliment into a barbed insult. Many sections of *Al tehi ka-avotekha* offer an expanded and highly intensified version of this kind of exchange, where Duran’s reliance on biblical quotation appears as a weapon whose lethal power to skewer Christian doctrine could be appreciated only by those to whom the Hebrew biblical text was quite familiar.

Some scholars take irony to be a fundamental characteristic of *converso* writing.⁴⁷ Others, while accepting the idea of a *converso*

“code,” contend that the code was so transparent as to be comprehensible by both Old and New Christian readers.⁴⁸ Indeed, in the case of Duran’s epistle we have only the word of the sixteenth-century printer Isaac Akrish that Christians read it “innocently”—that is, according to its surface meaning. Because Akrish’s tale seems apocryphal and the letter’s sarcasm is not *perfectly* veiled, the trend has been to reject the thesis of Christian naiveté. But if my understanding of the context of the Marco Lippomano letter mentioned in this book’s Introduction is correct, here is one Christian at least who seems to have thought of Duran as a voluntary convert. And if earlier scholars likewise tended to accept Akrish’s story, they did so in part because it helped to explain why Profayt Duran, a convert to Christianity, was not immediately arrested for Judaizing. It must be considered a real possibility that Duran chose this form because—in literature as in life—it enabled him to camouflage the unyielding tenacity of his Jewish beliefs.⁴⁹ Whether or not a Christian would have been fooled by his pose, maintaining it may have allowed him to preserve what we would today call “deniability.”

In any case, to distinguish between Christian and Jewish readers may be to draw the line in the wrong place. The ironic form and the compressed and camouflaged allusions may or may not have functioned to disguise the attack on Christianity, but among those whose ear was indeed attuned to the Hebrew Bible—and here one must surmise a mixed collection of Jews and former Jews, including both sincere and insincere converts to Christianity—another sort of distinction would have likely prevailed. Those loyal to Judaism would find Duran’s letter funny, evocative, and convincing, while those otherwise disposed, like Bonjorn, would find it galling. Or so Duran must have hoped. It is reflective both of the confused and unstable nature of the Jewish and *converso* communities during this period, and also of Duran’s own developing understanding of Judaism, that his rhetorical approach draws a line not between Jew and Christian but between Jew and loyal *converso* on the one hand and sincere convert to Christianity on the other.

In sum, Duran’s letter emerges from the personal experience of a forced convert in Christian Iberia in the years shortly after the riots of 1391. Its coded language, the bitter emotion behind its mockery of Christianity, and the intentional ambiguity of the author’s identity are closely aligned with what we understand of *converso* existence. It may be that Duran’s own situation as a *converso*—in which,

by necessity, he had to conceal his views from Christian society—brought him to write a letter whose innovative form so perfectly mirrored the form of his life.

To say this is not to gainsay the striking formal resemblance between *Al tehi ka-avotekha* and the “ironic letter of feigned praise”—a literary model with which Duran may have been familiar through d’Ailly’s epistle or some other easily accessible source. In the end, however, we do not need to choose between alternative scenarios. Living at the intersection of late-medieval Jewish and Christian communities, Profayt Duran composed an epistle that drew—in form as well as in content—from both.

History and Religion

Kelimat ha-goyim

In *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, the subject of the previous chapter, satirical form camouflages the sharpness of the criticisms of Christianity. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, a somewhat later work, is a direct attack on contemporary Christian dogma.¹ As in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, Duran's underlying assumption is that reason is an irrefutable source of truth and that arguments based on it have the most power to convince. Here, however, he takes a far more analytical approach, combining an awareness of the historical development of religion with a striking mastery of Christian texts and doctrine.

Duran begins with a dedication to an unnamed sage who, he writes, has requested some information about Christian doctrine. Citing the request of an acquaintance being possibly the most clichéd of medieval introductory tropes, one might be forgiven for dismissing it here as well. But in contrast to the usual practice, it is not confined to a single throwaway line but instead informs the voice of the entire composition. Throughout, Duran pauses to address the unnamed “glory of rabbis and the diadem of believers” who for his own polemical purposes has requested particular knowledge of Christian doctrine, and the work concludes with an *envoi* to its addressee.

It is commonly and reasonably conjectured that the addressee was Hasdai Crescas; the dedicatory poem includes the name Hasdai, and from Duran's words it is evident that the rabbi in question is not only an important figure in the Iberian Jewish world but also involved in reconstructing its shattered communities in the aftermath of the riots of 1391. We know this was the case with Crescas.² Yet we can

also posit that *Kelimat ha-goyim*, like other polemical writings, was intended for an audience of more than one. In his conclusion, Duran notes almost coyly that even if his addressee is too knowledgeable to need the treatment he has provided, someone less experienced in the subject, if the work should fall into his hands, might find it helpful.³

METHOD

Before Duran, most Jewish polemicists had defended Judaism mainly by contesting Christian interpretations of passages in either the Hebrew Bible or the Talmud. For the most part, Duran refrains here from dealing with Jewish claims, focusing instead on contemporary Christian teachings. The contents fall briefly under the following headings: Jesus' divinity, the doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation and original sin, abrogation of the Torah, the "new" covenant, transubstantiation, baptism, the infallibility of the Pope, the Virgin Mary, Christian (mis)interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, the dating of Jesus' birth, and, finally, Jerome's translation of the Hebrew Bible.

Probably the most significant aspect of the work is its methodology. Duran considers the problem of Christian dogma from the point of view of the historical development of religion. Specifically, in the case of Christianity he makes a distinction between errant persons—Jesus and his disciples, who were "pious fools"—and those "deceivers," like Paul and the later medieval theologians, who caused others to err by developing and enunciating what came to be core Christian beliefs. Presenting each doctrine in turn, Duran compares it with what Jesus and his disciples appear to have believed on the basis of their recorded actions and statements. That is, he reads the Gospels as historical documents: reliable testimony to the words said by Jesus and his disciples, and therefore subject to rational analysis. By providing (in most cases) both the scriptural proof texts cited by Christian interpreters and their interpretations of those texts, he is able to wield the Gospels themselves as a weapon against contemporary Christianity.

In carrying out his analysis, Duran's guiding principle is thus to use only those sources that his Christian opponents accept as authoritative: a method known in Hebrew as *kefi ma'amar ha-'omer* (lit. "according to the speaker's [own] speech"). In addition to the Gospels, many of Paul's Epistles, and other Christian Scriptures, Duran paraphrases, quotes, and cites by name later theological writings,

including the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, and the *Postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra. His choice of Latin texts seems to reflect a good sense of which Christian scholars were considered authoritative on various subjects. Nor were they obscure; Peter Lombard's *Sentences* was a standard manual, one that Dominican mendicants regularly carried with them.⁴

While this angle was not unknown among previous Jewish critics of Christianity, and while the technique of arguing "according to your opinion" (as in, "I accept your premises for the sake of argument, and even so you are wrong") goes back as far as the Talmud, never before had it been developed so carefully, at such length, and with such wholesale dependence on Christian texts.⁵ In Duran's case, Jeremy Cohen has pointed to the possible influence of a specific *Christian* tract: Raymond Martini's *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Judaeos* (ca. 1280). Martini had enlisted the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud as witnesses to the deviation of the Judaism of his day from the Judaism of the Bible, just as Duran would do against the claims of the church of *his* day.⁶

Nor was the technique entirely alien to Duran. Even before he came to write *Kelimat ha-goyim*, he had already made one or two small forays along the same lines. Here, for example, from *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, is a kind of preview of things to come:

And I have further doubts of this kind concerning that book, the book of the apostles. In general I do not see that any of them even one of the 613 commandments or that they released the seed of Abraham who had accepted the Torah of Moses upon their [own] souls and upon their [own] seed. And thus they themselves, since they were of that seed, upheld the Torah greatly after the death of the [Christian] messiah and [even] after they were baptized in his name, and this you will find explained in the aforementioned book; also they kept the law of the Nazirite as it is mentioned there.⁷ And [not only] I and they, [but] the messiah himself acknowledged its eternity and even this you will find in the fifth chapter⁸ of the book of the evangelist [Matthew].⁹

In this passage, Duran reports having consulted the Christian writings and having failed to find any evidence that the early Christians abrogated the Torah.¹⁰ To the contrary, Jesus and his disciples appear rather to have observed the Mosaic commandments punctiliously, and to have accepted the eternity of the Torah. He even provides citations. The rich possibilities open to him in this line of investigation are fully exploited in *Kelimat ha-goyim*, where, in fact, this particular

issue, namely, whether Jesus and his disciples meant to abrogate the Torah, is announced in the introduction as one of the book's primary themes.¹¹

Duran's skill in reading Christian Scripture, his practiced hand at rational interpretation, and his ability to weave in relevant (and contrasting) Christian doctrine are all quite remarkable—as is his assured tone. To illustrate: in the first chapter, Duran's progressive argument against the divinity of Jesus goes roughly as follows.¹² First, Jesus never intended to claim divinity, nor did his disciples consider him divine. To prove this, Duran observes that neither Jesus himself nor his disciples ever referred to him as God, only lord or teacher; even their use of the term “son of God” was meant merely to indicate his superior human qualities. Besides, there are events reported by his disciples that it would be unreasonable to assign to God; these include Satan's having tried to seduce him and his having been in a place where he was unable to perform a miracle. In addition, Duran cites statements of Jesus implicitly denying his divinity, notes moments when his power seems limited, and touches on the fact that both he and Mary seem to have regarded Joseph as his actual father.¹³

Having shown that Jesus and his disciples never thought he was God, Duran turns to the passages in Christian Scripture that were read by his second group, the “deceivers,” as indicating divinity. In one of them, from the Gospel of John, Jesus says that he and his father are one. But Duran turns the statement, taken by Paul in his Epistles and in the book of Revelation as evidence that Jesus was God, into an argument for his own side. In that same passage in John, Jesus is accused by Jews of blasphemy; to defend himself, he adduces a verse from Psalms that seems to imply he does not mean to be taken literally. Duran reads the entire story as a programmatic statement of how Jesus meant all such words of his to be understood: namely, as metaphors.¹⁴ As he points out, Jesus liked to talk in parables, so one may reasonably interpret some of his statements figuratively. Paul and later authors who proclaim Jesus' divinity as doctrine were perverting his meaning and intention.

Turning next to the Hebrew prophets and those passages adduced by Christians as foretelling the coming of Jesus, Duran rebuts the general Christian claim that biblical commandments and narratives prefigure the narrative of Jesus' life and crucifixion, asserting that it is not God's way to provide signs of an event hundreds of years before it happens.¹⁵ His final main point in this chapter is that Christian

scholars themselves perceive the problems and contradictions in the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. These they attempt to solve by assigning two aspects or natures to Jesus, the human and the divine.

Explicating this principle, Duran points to the difficulties it entails. Consider the crucifixion, he writes, adducing the example of a merchant executed for murder. While he is sentenced only as a murderer and not as a merchant, nevertheless the merchant aspect of him does die. Similarly, you may imagine that Jesus was killed only in his human aspect, but the divine aspect was killed as well. Again, when on the cross Jesus calls out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?,” this must represent an instance of God calling out to God. But you cannot say such a nonsensical thing of God.¹⁶

A particularly clever example of Duran’s strategy occurs in the final chapter of *Kelimat ha-goyim*. Asserting that Jerome’s Vulgate is rife with grammatical errors and misunderstandings, he also registers his awareness of a Christian counterargument: namely, that Jerome’s translation was made from the true, original text of Hebrew Scripture and not the version redacted by Jews in order to hide the truth of Christianity. To get around this potential objection, he restricts himself to quotations from the Hebrew Bible appearing in the Gospels and Paul’s Epistles and thus presumably accepted by Christians as authentic and true.¹⁷ One example is a line from Isaiah that in Hebrew means “the heart of this people is fat”¹⁸ and is so cited, accurately, by Jesus.¹⁹ Yet Jerome renders it as an imperative statement, “Blind the heart of this people,”²⁰ thus missing not only the verb form but the meaning of a key word.

RATIONALISM

Duran’s approach in *Kelimat ha-goyim*, both historically and textually acute, is also permeated with his rationalist presuppositions. Consider the first words of the first chapter:

Jesus the Christian, and his students and emissaries who are called apostles, I call “errant ones” since they erred only and did not attain the level of causing others to err—except just a little, and this was because of their deficiency. Those who came after them among the theologians of this people I call deceivers, since along with their [own] erring, they attained the level of causing many [others] to err; and this was [done] by means of what they had investigated in the science of logic and some philosophy. Thinking to obtain help from the enemy in establishing their faith, they made a mixture of honey and

gall.²¹ And after this, I say that when one examines their statements [in a spirit of] pure inquiry, without habit or custom, stripped of pretext, it can be seen that never did the pretended messiah intend to make himself a god, nor did the errant ones intend this.²²

All three levels of Duran's rationalist approach are already sketched in these remarks.

First, he takes as his standard of evaluation the principles of reason, in particular the intellect. He states his intention to examine Christian statements unencumbered by "habit or custom," by which I take him to mean the traditional interpretation of the words; without any "pretext,"²³ by which he seems to mean objectively and without prejudice (or without what we might today call an "agenda"); and in a spirit of "pure inquiry" (*be-'iyyun muhlat*).²⁴ He thus makes claim to the common ground that exists between himself and, in theory, any other rational being.

Second, in distinguishing between hapless apostles and politically astute theologians, Duran gives us a glimpse into his historical principles. He sees the Christian religion as having been born out of human ignorance and error, as being progressively shaped by the self-serving political interests of Christian leaders, and as ultimately being developed into a full-fledged theological system through the intentional and unintentional misunderstanding of Scripture by Christian scholars.

Third, there are the uncompromisingly elitist standards by which Duran implicitly judges the whole religion. If Jesus and his disciples can be dismissed as unintelligent and wrongheaded but not culpable (because incapable) of misleading others, Paul and the later theologians are held to a stricter standard—although even they have mastered only logic and a little philosophy.

All three levels of judgment can be traced throughout the rest of the book. Duran's regnant assumption is that the accepted principles of philosophical analysis combined with the reasonable consideration of text (in this case the Gospels) represent universal standards applicable as well to the critical assessment of Christianity. In this light, he repeatedly refutes the logical reasoning of his opponents, as when Christians, attempting to argue for the abrogation of the Torah by means of rational proof (*re'ayah sikhlit*), can be shown to proceed on the basis of false premises whose incorrectness is obvious.²⁵ He dismisses one argument as being "outside rational logic" (*hutz mi-ha-heqesh ha-sikhli*).²⁶ Elsewhere, he argues against the Christian

interpretation of the purpose of baptism by calling it merely an “opinion,” made up of images and parables with no actual proof.²⁷

His historical awareness, too, colors much of the book; it is visible not only in his argument regarding the divinity of Jesus (as seen above) but also, for example, in the eleventh chapter where he subjects to inspection the narratives of Matthew and Luke regarding Jesus’ birth. Neither of these authors, he notes, specifies in which year of the reign of Herod this event took place, though later Christians would place it three years before Herod’s death. Duran then calculates the date of Herod’s death with reference to the reign of the various Caesars, beginning with Augustus (who appointed Herod) and continuing through Tiberius (whose rule began when Jesus was sixteen).

Duran’s purpose here is not to call into question the Gospel narrative but rather to counter a later Christian argument that the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people were inflicted by God as direct punishment for the crucifixion. According to the Talmud, a series of portents heralded the destruction of the Temple forty years prior to the event itself. This, Duran maintains, is the reason later Christian writers placed the time of the crucifixion exactly forty years before the destruction—because they wished to show that “it was because of that sin that the Temple was destroyed and Israel was exiled from its land.” In Duran’s reading, their polemical purposes induced them consciously to misrepresent the chronology.²⁸ By attacking the Christian chronology of Jesus’ birth, Duran can also counter this argument directly.

Finally, Duran’s intellectually elitist attitudes fundamentally inform this polemic. He frequently qualifies Christians as mentally deficient, ignorant of Scripture, and, still more evocative of his value system, philosophically uneducated. His attitude shows itself most vividly in repeated derogations of the intelligence, learning, and mental balance of Jesus and his disciples. They wished to be pious, but were only pious fools;²⁹ Jesus was not only dim but mad as well.³⁰ When it came to knowledge of Scripture, one of the signs of a good education, the early Christians were woefully deficient, having gleaned their acquaintance with the Torah from listening to public sermons on the Sabbath and then mixing up what they heard.³¹ They were also unlettered in philosophy, to the point where Jesus himself failed to grasp the true nature of the soul. Thinking it was corporeal, made up of fine matter, he and those who came afterward were convinced that he, together with his mother Mary and those who believed in him, would physically sit in heaven at God’s right hand.³²

In an intriguing and illuminating personal anecdote, Duran opens the second chapter of *Kelimat ha-goyim* by relating how, while studying as a young man in a *yeshivah*, he heard a number of his fellow students claiming Jesus and his disciples to have been kabbalists, though with a confused understanding of that tradition. To one of these students, the miracles performed by Jesus had been effectuated by means of “the practical component” of kabbalah,³³ and thus ostensibly permitted by the rabbis; to this the objection was raised that the Talmud in the tractate Sanhedrin asserts that Jesus was culpable of using magic (*kishef*), a kind of “magic” specifically forbidden. A Talmudist from Ashkenaz concurred, adding that the practical kabbalah employed was of the “left side,” that is, the side of impurity, which would indeed be considered to fall into the category of forbidden “magic.”

Considering all this, Duran stipulates certain similarities between Christian doctrine and kabbalah. Among other things, they share a tendency to multiply attributes of the godhead and, in so doing, make use of a comparable terminology; here Duran adduces the kabbalah’s ten *sefirot* and the multiple persons of the Trinity and the array of terms for the divinity (“father,” “son,” “word of God,” “image of God,” and so forth). Exposing his philosophical loyalties, however, he defends the kabbalistic system precisely on the grounds that the *sefirot* indicate not essential attributes of God, which is what Christians mean when they speak of the Trinity, but rather only attributes of relation.³⁴

Duran’s conclusion: the early Christians were intellectually too wanting (“I saw their deficiency and the smallness of their intellect”)³⁵ to have attained a grasp of kabbalah. Their mistakes came from elsewhere: Jesus’ miracles were not kabbalistic magic but Egyptian magic.

This may seem rather curious, for in these passages, Duran appears to present kabbalah as in conformity with the generally accepted principles of philosophy. But as we will see in greater detail in Chapter 12, Duran’s rationalism, typical of his milieu, in no way rejects magical practices or the reality of their effects; nor does it group all such practices as religiously forbidden. Indeed, what makes the theories (and magical practices) of the kabbalists acceptable to Duran is the fact that they are by his lights, and in contrast to Christian doctrine, philosophically viable.

As in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, his “letter,” so too here, Duran is implicitly arguing that Christianity and Christian dogma are fundamentally at odds with logic and philosophy, and Christian theologians who attempt to recruit philosophy in support of their religious doctrines

are seeking “help from the enemy.” Later in *Kelimat ha-goyim*, as earlier in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, he will make reference to the dichotomy between reason and faith, placing Judaism squarely on the one side, Christianity squarely on the other:

And [the Christians] disagreed about . . . what has been explained by demonstrative proof in the mathematical and physical and metaphysical sciences, and about all the roots and particular principles of the sciences—as I explained in a letter. And behold they rejected every doubt by saying that the *divine faculty* [*inyan elohi*] is superior to the human intellect and that the intellect is not capable of apprehending these mysteries and great hints and hidden secrets. For because Jesus said this and founded this root upon it, one cannot murmur about it, for it is complete truth, and in [examining] the reason for the mysteries of religion, faith is certain and investigation is dangerous; and thus it is written in the book *Sententiae* in the fourth section.³⁶

In *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, Duran had argued that, for Christians, faith (religious doctrine) and investigation (reason) oppose each other and one must side with the former against the latter—a position he rejects in the case of Judaism, where doctrine makes rational sense, while accentuating it in the case of Christianity. In this passage from *Kelimat ha-goyim*, he acknowledges the existence of a Christian counter-argument, one that distinguishes between doctrines that are merely counter to reason and those that are beyond or above reason. According to Duran here, the Christian position is that if Jesus has established a particular doctrine, one must believe in it even if all the sciences disprove it absolutely (note the term “demonstrative proof”), for the “mysteries of religion” are simply hidden from the human intellect.

The concession is noteworthy, if indeed he accepts it (which seems unlikely), but it does not negate Duran’s core assumptions about the ultimate value of reason as a standard of evaluation for the claims of Christianity as opposed to those of Judaism. Even those whose ties to the Jewish tradition have become weak, or have been rendered weak by external circumstance, can see that the tools of logical analysis, which include historical contextualization, are universally true, and should be accepted by all.

As a Jewish polemic against Christianity, *Kelimat ha-goyim* is striking for its methodology. It is no less striking for its extensive use of Latin sources. And that points to a question: what were the

circumstances of its composition? Most Jewish polemicists seem to have learned about Christian doctrines through Christian missionizing efforts. But as Daniel Lasker has pointed out, Duran's quotations are too precise to have been absorbed through oral communication.³⁷ While he might have had a Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew,³⁸ the Latin sources that show up in *Kelimat ha-goyim* go far beyond that work.³⁹ At some point he learned Latin, and learned it well; had access to Latin books, and used them.

Kelimat ha-goyim has been dated to around 1397 or 1398, a half dozen years or so after his conversion. In so brief a span, could Duran have both mastered the language and read critically an impressive number of texts, including Christian theology? That seems improbable. Besides, already in *Heshev ha-Efod* (1394) and *Al tehi ka-avotekha* (c. 1395), Duran was using citations from the Christian Gospels to attack Christianity.

It is likely, then, that Duran's knowledge of Latin predated his conversion. The opportunity, and the stimulus, could well have been provided by his medical profession. Leon Joseph of Carcassonne, a physician of Perpignan and acquaintance and contemporary of Duran's, commented bitterly that knowledge of Latin was essential to a medical education. And it was in the field of medicine that translations from Latin into Hebrew were most common.⁴⁰

Certainly Duran took quick advantage of living as a Christian to make use of his now fuller access to Christian literature. One has to wonder how, exactly, he pursued this goal, and under what conditions. From whom did he acquire his books of theology? Did he explain his interest by claiming to be a sincere seeker after Christian truth? In his chapter in *Kelimat ha-goyim* on the Trinity, Duran refers to a problematic clause in 1 John (5:7–8) that appears in some manuscripts and commentaries on John but not in others. He reports having questioned many Christian scholars who denied the existence of this passage until he showed them where it appears in some books and also in the Lyra commentary.⁴¹

Did Duran indeed pose such disingenuous questions to Christian scholars? And how did he manage the actual composition of this work? By bringing Latin books home with him for his secretive purposes? Certainly, once the polemic was written, there were dangers involved in circulating it. If done anonymously, as I suggested in Chapter 1, it might be possible to get away with such activity. But to be discovered engaged in it could not have been anything other than ruinous. Under

the circumstances, it is in fact quite astonishing that, with the authority gained from his newly acquired knowledge, Duran makes such boldly polemical use of his Latin reading to criticize Christianity itself from within its own history and guiding assumptions.

Just as *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in its house-of-mirrors literary form and its only partly camouflaged anguish, reflects one way of negotiating the dissimulations of *converso* life, here again parallels suggest themselves between Duran's circumstances and the form of his literary expression. In *Kelimat ha-goyim*, Duran places himself rhetorically within the enemy's camp, accepting his antagonist's texts (*kefi ma'amar ha-'omer*) in order to undermine the whole structure from within. The method suggests how Duran saw his life: he had entered, however unwillingly, into the world of his adversaries and was there engaged in finding out as much as he could, precisely in order to combat them from the inside.

In this particular role, Duran may have seen himself as a direct counter to those Jewish apostates who, once baptized, used their knowledge of Judaism to attack *it*. These persons seem indeed to have been of particular concern to him, as they no doubt were to the Jewish community as a whole. Duran refers to them in the preface to *Kelimat ha-goyim* as perhaps the most worrisome opponents: "You have seen the days of evil and the fury poured out upon the exile of Jerusalem that is in Sefarad, and apostates [*mitpartzim*]⁴² have multiplied and those *that seek deep to hide their counsel* (Is. 29:15),⁴³ *to cast a mount* (Ez. 21:27) against the wall of the divine Torah, to make it *as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city* (Is. 1:8)."⁴⁴ The passage seems to suggest an increase since the riots of 1391 in the number of such Jewish apostates, likened by Duran to an army taking the field against the Torah. It would not be surprising if his words here allude specifically to the activity of, among others, Pablo de Santa Maria, whose conversion has been dated to around 1391. Duran refers to Pablo by name in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, and was clearly sensitive to his particular role in the Jewish-Christian polemic. At the end of *Ma'aseh Efod*, which I examine later, he inveighs in particular against the way Scripture is twisted by such apostates on behalf of Christianity: "Read 'they that murmured' (Is. 29:24) [as referring to] those who went forth from the children of Israel into heresy, to speak error about the Torah in their inadequate understanding of scripture; and they turned the words of the living God."⁴⁵ The quoted passage from Isaiah is about the messianic end-times; little wonder that Duran should

seize upon it to focus on the refutation and hoped-for downfall of these formerly Jewish, now anti-Jewish, agitators.

Who, finally, were the readers of *Kelimat ha-goyim*? It is striking how few manuscripts are extant from the fifteenth century: one, possibly two, both written in an Italian hand.⁴⁶ Duran's arguments did make their way, however, into other fifteenth-century polemical texts; traces can be found in Shem Tov ibn Shaprut's *Even Bohan*, Shimon ben Zemah Duran's *Keshet u-Magen*, and similar works by others. Nevertheless, the overall audience could only have been small. The reader would have to have known Hebrew, and therefore to have been either a Jew or a *converso*. For a Jew, combating the textual claims of Christians may not have been an entirely relevant exercise. A more natural audience for the polemic, Benzion Netanyahu proposes, would have been those Jews who had accepted Christianity—"who recognized, at least to some extent, the authority of Jesus. Thus . . . the work was meant primarily for the Marranos, and more particularly, for those among them who were partly Christianized, or on the verge of complete Christianization."⁴⁷

Netanyahu cites *Kelimat ha-goyim* in the course of arguing for the early assimilation of the *conversos* to Christianity. One might speculate that it was more useful as a preventive measure against indoctrination than as a means of undermining the faith of one already partly or completely Christianized. Indeed, for a *converso*, someone newly encountering Christian doctrine and Christian indoctrinators, *Kelimat ha-goyim* would provide an excellent manual of resistance.

But to possess such a text might have been almost as dangerous as to have written it. The lack of copies from fifteenth-century Iberia certainly suggests that it was not widely circulated, and the contents of the work are perhaps too technical and detailed for it to be readily intelligible to most *conversos*, even those literate in Hebrew. Which makes it perhaps most likely that Duran intended the work exactly as he presents it in his preface, namely, primarily as an aid to those already engaged in anti-Christian polemic and needing to know whether the intention of Jesus and his disciples was to "destroy the Law" either entirely or partially, and on what grounds contemporary Christian theologians based their doctrinal pronouncements on this and related matters. If the work was sent directly to Hasdai Crescas, as suggested by the preface, it is conceivable that Crescas himself made sure it was circulated anonymously⁴⁸ and only among parties directly interested.

In sum, in *Kelimat ha-goyim*, a work whose composition could not have been other than fraught with danger, Duran was responding to a call to action from Hasdai Crescas. The sustained dissimulation involved in this particular enterprise is truly impressive. If our understanding of the circumstances of the work's composition is accurate, Duran was acting, in a sense, as Crescas's inside man. He read extensively in Christian texts and Latin theology, probably taking advantage of his position at court to acquire the necessary volumes and to inquire of Christian scholars when necessary. At the same time, his purpose was utterly subversive. The writing of this book was not a matter of passive resistance but active antagonism; *Kelimat ha-goyim* is one of the few Jewish polemical works that do not take a defensive tone but focus almost solely on understanding, presenting, and ultimately undermining Christianity.

CONCLUSIONS

In this part of the book, I have analyzed a diverse selection of Duran's writings—from astronomy to arithmology to calendrics to two very different examples of polemic—for the interplay in them between Jewish identity and rationality, and between religious truth claims and the putative neutrality of scientific activity.

I began by arguing that Duran's astronomy was pursued both for its religious benefits, following Gersonides, and for its relevance to Maimonides' discussion of the "true perplexity" in *Guide* II.24. I then showed how Duran deployed his mathematical knowledge in order to explain why the Hebrew Bible is suffused with references to the number seven—which, in his demonstration, shows the Jewish God's creation of and mastery over the universe. The treatise on the calendar, *Heshev ha-Efod*, was written, I proceeded to argue, for three purposes: to provide the shaken Jewish communities of his time with a grasp of the basic astronomical underpinnings of the Jewish calendar; to explain certain baffling Talmudic rules and statements so as to demonstrate the ancient rabbis' attention to the realities of celestial motion and thereby respond to the claims of Christian superiority; and, by proving that the Jewish calendar was the most rational and scientifically accurate of calendrical systems, to reaffirm and uphold the high cultural and intellectual prestige of the medieval Iberian Jewish elites. As for the two polemical works, in *Al tehi ka-avotekha* we find Duran arguing that Judaism as a whole is the most rational of

religions and one that encourages scientific learning; in *Kelimat ha-goyim*, we find him subjecting Christianity to a rational and historically aware critique interlaced with intellectualist criticisms of Jesus and the early Christians themselves.

In all these various facets of Duran's thought, we have seen his interest in science and reason tending to merge imperceptibly with his sense of mission as a Jewish scholar in a Christian world whose construction of reality needs to be countered. And rationality is not just a weapon with which to fight for Judaism; it comes in some ways to be identified *with* Judaism, and with his view of himself as a Jew.

But if science is an aspect of his "Jewish identity," his science is itself also "Jewish," although in a variety of very different registers. To return briefly to the scientific teaching described in Chapter 2, there we saw Duran responding to the practical needs of students wishing to use planetary and lunar tables as well as instruments for celestial observation, most likely for astrological (and astrological-medical) purposes. Even in that relatively neutral register of practical scientific learning, and despite the universality of the subject, the "Jewishness" of Duran and his students was not entirely effaced. A significant number of their textual sources were Jewish, their language of study was Hebrew, and, given the pressures of the times and what we know of Duran's larger concerns, one cannot exclude an underlying feeling for the solidarity and morale of these students and prospective peers.

Still, the questions being addressed in that setting are in striking contrast to the questions raised and answers given, either explicitly or implicitly, in, for example, Duran's treatise on the Jewish calendar. There, already living as a Christian and engaged in astronomical-astrological work at the court of Joan I, but highly attuned to his Jewish or *converso* audience, he presents himself as simultaneously a scholar and as a fully identified Jew anxious to shore up, in turn, the identity and confidence of his readers. Finally, in his polemical works, he deploys science, philosophy, and rationalism for openly religious aims.

In brief, science and rationalism form a part of Duran's self-image as a Jew, and to one degree or another, depending on the setting, that self-image factors in his scientific activity. But the dynamic among these elements and the expressive form taken by that dynamic are highly flexible and fluid. Given his nature, his gifts, and his loyalties, and given the conditions imposed on him from without, so they would have to be.

PART THREE

The Efod Atones for Idolatry

Having examined the interaction of rationalism and religious polemic in a number of Duran's writings, and having noted the flexibility of his Jewish identity in different contexts, I now turn to explore those of Duran's postconversion writings that will shed further light on the evolving nature of his identity. In our first text, composed in late 1393, only a year or two after his conversion, we will see the seeds of a thorough rethinking of the essence of Judaism and the means of perpetuating it. That rethinking will come to fruition ten years later in *Ma'aseh Efod*, a work of his maturity (and the last in our possession) in which Duran enunciates his view of the true, inner meaning of Jewish worship.

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The Inner Life

Eulogy for Abraham ha-Levi of Girona

In 1393, Duran composed a eulogy for Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi of Girona, a gifted poet and rabbinic leader of his people.¹ Addressed to En Joseph Abram, the son of the deceased, the eulogy may have been intended to be read aloud at a memorial service or otherwise circulated among the mourners. Reflecting some of the agonies endured by the Jewish communities of Catalonia, the eulogy offers a kind of laboratory setting in which to observe the playing out of such issues as the causes of Jewish suffering, faith in God and rebellion against God, the definition of a Jew worthy of redemption, and the relative value of outer observance and inner intention.

Throughout, the last-named theme, internal intention (*kavvanah*), is central. Indeed, in various contexts and various guises, the distinction between thought and deed, inner and outer life, holds one of the keys to Duran's attitude, as a Jew and as a *converso*, toward the competing religions of Judaism and Christianity. With his fellow forced converts clearly in mind, he not only stresses the centrality of continued inner intention but values it above deeds that are all too often empty of such intention, and asserts that forced converts whose deeds are idolatrous but whose hearts are pure merit redemption along with the rest of the Jewish people.

SUMMARY

The eulogy takes the form of an exegetical interpretation of Isaiah 57:1, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and

merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”

The biblical context is a prophetic tirade against sin, licentiousness, idolatry, unfaithfulness to the God of Israel. Nevertheless, its message is that God will not always be angry but will eventually heal the sinners. In the context of this eulogy, Duran was saying among other things that the deceased, Abraham Isaac ha-Levi, was one of the few “righteous” who did not succumb to the lure of Christianity but, in Isaiah’s phrase, was “taken away from the evil to come.”

Duran first likens the condition of the Jewish community to that of a patient experiencing a bodily pain so overwhelming that he is prevented from attending to other, lesser ailments. The wound is in fact “incurable,” not on account of any lack of skill or ability on the part of the doctor but on account of the patient’s faulty *complexio* and the extraordinary severity of the blow. The patient is of course the Jewish people, who suffer so greatly from the lengthy and seemingly incurable exile that other sorrows—like the death of Abraham ha-Levi, who perished from a broken spirit in the aftermath of the destruction of the Jewish communities of Castile and Catalonia—are hardly noticed. The doctor, God, is not to blame for this; rather, at fault are the people themselves and their temperament.

Indeed, the loss of the righteous is a punishment for the people—in this case, for their lack of *kavvanah* in performing the commandments. Their rebelliousness is one of the reasons for the continued exile and for God’s seeming indifference to the fate of the Jews. It is exacerbated by the loss of the Temple sacrifices, which were a means of drawing down the divine efflux and preserving God’s presence, the *shekhinah*, in the world. Without the sacrifices, and without *kavvanah* in observance of the commandments, the Jews are without the protection of divine providence. And here Duran digresses briefly for another medical parable, this one likening the Temple sacrifices to medicines prescribed by the divine physician. If, despite the presence of the sacrificial cult, the Temple was nevertheless destroyed, the reason lay (again) not in any deficiency of salvific power on God’s part but in the admixture of idolatrous practices in Temple worship—which, just as a composite medicament like theriac can be ruined if any one of its numerous ingredients is wrong—vitiated the protective capacity of the sacrifices themselves.

Drawing on such explanations for the destruction of the ancient Temple in order to illuminate the current situation, Duran obliquely

criticizes the inexperience and self-interest of post-1391 Jewish leaders.² There are three problems with those leaders: some choose the “partial good”—presumably the good of their own, elite group—over the general good, there is internal dissent among the leaders, and leadership is now commonly vested in the unintelligent and the inexperienced. This, for Duran, forms a marked contrast with Abraham ha-Levi, who appreciated the general good, cultivated good relations with others, and evinced skill in administration.

And yet the loss of this particular righteous man, although a punishment, can also help atone for the rest of his community as a chastisement atones for sin. Just as the priestly vestments match the sins for which they are intended to atone, the death of the righteous, those perfect in belief and observance, can atone for the community’s rebelliousness. Moreover, as a popular idea would have it, the righteous can intercede for the people with God, after the example of Father Abraham, and their death may also “awaken the hearts of the people” so that they will repair their ways and return to proper observance. The most important such observance, Duran notes, is circumcision, the sign of the covenant, which by itself suffices for redemption.

Turning next to the subject of the *conversos* of his generation, “that part of the seed of Abraham who were forced outwardly to annul their Torah and upon whom the decree of apostasy fell in this great region,” Duran invokes a Talmudic parable whose particulars I discuss below. In this “exile” as opposed to others, he remarks, some of the people have been forced to convert under absolute duress and in fear of their lives. But they are still God’s chosen ones, descendants of Abraham who was beloved of God. And God, who knows the secrets of their hearts, will redeem them with their brethren as equal inheritors of the Torah. Drawing on Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*, Duran suggests that like a seed planted in the earth that seems to disappear but will later sprout, the *conversos* appear to have become Christians, but the change is only external and apparent, only a husk and outer shell. The core and essence remain as they were, and will blossom in the future time.

Adducing yet another passage from the *Kuzari* (for which see Chapter 4), Duran now compares the divine emanation of knowledge and prophecy with the light of the sun. Just as some objects, like crystal, are more receptive of light than others, so too, some people, outstanding in wisdom and perfection, are more receptive of divine emanation than others. And some—Duran concludes his eulogy—such as

the righteous Abraham ha-Levi, are so wise and perfect that they can emanate that wisdom and that perfection to others.

ROTE PERFORMANCE OF THE COMMANDMENTS

Let us look at this richly evocative eulogy in greater detail, focusing first on Duran's criticism of Jewish practice and second on his defense of the *conversos*.

In discussing which sins of the people brought on them the catastrophes of 1391, epitomized in the death of Abraham ha-Levi, Duran names the historical loss of the sacrificial services in the Temple due to idolatry and the enduring dereliction represented by rote performance of the commandments. It is the latter—the rebelliousness against God signaled in the merely outward and insincere observance of the commandments³—for which Duran reserves his fiercest condemnation,⁴ for it has incurred nothing less than the removal of divine providence.

This punishment for the people follows from rebelliousness. It is because, when the people do not have particular intention [*kavvanah*] in the performance of the scriptural deeds [i.e., the commandments required by Scripture], their observance is only outward and corporeal, paying no heed to scriptural meanings [*kavvanot*]. Thus the punishment for rebelliousness is the people's loss of wisdom—true wisdom; as it says, “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me. . . . Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work” (Is. 29:13). And I say that this is one of the reasons for the loss of providence and the “hiding of the face” and the people's being crushed by the sword and flame in captivity and shame again and again in the time of this great exile. I mean the performance of deed alone, stripped of all other intention. And the highest of its levels is the group that goes around the house and does not see the face of the king at all, and [Scripture] already hinted at this when it said “All this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth” (Dan. 9:13), since the deed is not complete without the intellection of its truth, which is the intended purpose.⁵

In this extended passage, Duran briefly but notably invokes the parable of the king's house in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. There, Maimonides defines “the group that goes around the house” (in Duran's words) but cannot enter as those who “believe true opinions on the

basis of traditional authority and study the law concerning the practices of divine service but do not engage in speculation concerning the fundamental principles of religion.”⁶ These Duran puts at the “highest” level of those who perform commandments without intention—which, enlarging on Maimonides, he connects with intellectual speculation. Implicitly acknowledging different levels of rote observance, he does not mention the lower level specified in Maimonides’ parable, populated by those seeking the king’s house but never setting eyes on it. The latter group is described by Maimonides as “ignoramuses who observe the commandments”—which is to say, who have not even risen to a belief in “true opinions on the basis of traditional authority.”

For Duran, it would appear, unless one knows the principles of religion, one cannot apprehend the meaning and “intended purpose” of the religious practices based on those principles. One will therefore lack proper *kavvanah*, and one’s “practices of divine service” will be null and void. When whole groups are guilty of such a dereliction, divine providence is removed from the people as a whole, who are then punished by persecutions and a “hiding of the [divine] face.”

Duran’s hard-line position on *kavvanah* requires further explication. Contemporary kabbalists, too, required that one know the true purpose of a commandment, because only thus could one have the proper *kavvanah* that enables its complete or perfect performance. But Duran’s emphasis on *kavvanah* is not necessarily traceable to kabbalistic influence. Nissim of Girona was another major proponent of *kavvanah*, by which, however, he meant not just directing one’s thoughts heavenward or intellectually apprehending the meaning of the commandments but submitting one’s will to God’s.⁷ The same idea is found in Hasdai Crescas, and may be compared as well with the position taken by the Cretan Abraham bar Judah, who composed his sole philosophical treatise, *Arba‘ah Turim*, while studying with Crescas in the 1380s.⁸

Discussing the *kavvanah* needed to fulfill a divine commandment properly, Abraham bar Judah rails against those who contend that “the intention of the Torah in general regarding the commandments is about knowledge [or apprehension, as he later terms it], not action.” “Rather,” he insists, “it is about both.” But for him action takes precedence, or is at least prior to knowledge and leads to it. For example, part of the reason for Sabbath observance is to come to know that this world was created and that it has a Creator.⁹

The target of Abraham's protest is the notion that knowledge of the purpose or underlying reason of a commandment is needed in order properly to observe it, a position that would seem close to that held by Duran. Instead, everyone, man and woman, wise and foolish, is required to observe the commandments, and not everyone has knowledge of their reasons, or even the capacity to acquire that knowledge. How, then, do the ignorant derive benefit from their observance? Abraham's answer is to separate the *reason* for the commandments from the issue of *intention*. For him, the *kavvanah* required is not of the informed variety but is simply the intention to fulfill the will of the Creator; all one needs in that connection is "to know and to intend before Whom I do the commandment, and for the sake of Whom, so that one is not like a horse or a donkey, without understanding."¹⁰ This kind of minimal *kavvanah* is indeed required.

Duran, for his part, does not respond directly to Abraham bar Judah's objection. He is not, here, particularly concerned with those Jews who, though lacking a philosophical education, nevertheless observe the commandments wholeheartedly. Rather, his fundamental concern is with those lacking even the minimal intention to serve God and therefore unworthy to receive any portion of the divine emanation; in this category, evidently, Duran would place the sinning Jews of his time.

In castigating Jews who observe the commandments outwardly while being inwardly without faith, without *kavvanah*, Duran renders all the more striking his defense of the forced converts of his time (among whom we must count Duran himself). They *cannot* observe the commandments—yet, according to his depiction, they do inwardly adhere to the Jewish faith. Their hearts are still true, and they are still part of the "seed of Abraham."

DEFENSE OF THE CONVERSOS

Duran's treatment of the *converso* situation opens with his quotation of and subsequent explication of a lengthy passage from b. *Menahot* purporting to reproduce a conversation in which Abraham reproaches God for having destroyed the Temple and suggests that the people may not have deserved so great a punishment. With words and phrases taken from a verse in Jeremiah ("What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou

rejoicest”),¹¹ God responds in effect that the Jewish nation, having “rejoiced” in its “evil,” has fully deserved the punishment of exile:

When the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, found Abraham, who was in the Temple. He said to him, “*What hath my beloved to do in mine house?*” He said to Him: “because of the doings of my children I came.” He said to him: “they sinned and they were exiled.” He said to Him: “perhaps only a minority sinned?” He said to him: “*with many.*” He said to Him: “perhaps they sinned unintentionally.” He said to him: “*she hath wrought lewdness.*” He said to Him: “You should have remembered the covenant of circumcision.” He said to him: “*and the holy flesh is passed from thee.*” He said to Him: “perhaps if you had been clement toward them they would have returned to the good.” He said to him: “*when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest.*”¹²

Abraham thereupon breaks down and weeps, fearing there can be no redemption. But God responds with a consoling verse taken from the same passage in Jeremiah, calling Israel “a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit.”¹³

To all this Duran devotes a lengthy exegetical comment, comparing the present exile with past instances. Before doing so, however, he notes that the Talmudic passage is meant not literally but parabolically. One of its purposes is to warn the people away from specific sins for which they might be punished.¹⁴ He then draws the listener’s attention to one of those sins, itself mentioned specifically in the Talmudic source: “And the greatest in importance and the first of the commandments of the Torah is circumcision, which is a sign of the covenant for the seed of Abraham. And since it suffices for the redemption of the people, he says: ‘you should have remembered the covenant of circumcision,’ and that is the truth according to its mystery [*sod*] and the intention in it among those who know the truth [of the matter].”¹⁵

Circumcision, then, a sign of the covenant between God and the “seed of Abraham,” “suffices for . . . redemption,” which is precisely why Abraham invokes it in his defense of the Jewish people. But similarly, Duran instructs, when God responds with the phrase “*the holy flesh is passed from thee,*” he has in mind the neglect of circumcision. Duran explicitly connects this to current events: “I say that this alludes to that part of the seed of Abraham who were forced outwardly to annul their Torah and upon whom the decree of apostasy fell in this great region, for to them, only the phrase ‘*and the holy flesh is passed from thee*’ applies; in order to awaken their hearts to return

to the Lord so he will have compassion for them, it says: ‘perhaps if You had been clement toward them they would have returned.’”¹⁶ In this reading, the warning about circumcision is aimed at those of the current generation who have been forced to abjure their faith and who, presumably because of their perilous situation vis-à-vis the Inquisition, might be tempted to neglect precisely the commandment of circumcision. Not only does it apply to them, it applies with a force that other warnings may not—for, as Duran writes, only a minority sinned, they sinned unintentionally, and therefore they may be spared the full severity of the divine wrath.

Some scholars have suggested that a perceived move among certain fifteenth- and sixteenth-century rabbis to make circumcision *the* central commandment of Judaism was an attempt to compensate for the outwardly Christian life of the *conversos*.¹⁷ In a few cases during the second half of the fifteenth century, after a child was baptized at church, he was returned home, washed, and then circumcised.¹⁸ But for all the obvious reasons, fulfilling this commandment, involving a physically indelible marker of “Judaizing,” could entail real danger. As his “warning” acknowledges, Duran was sensitive to that danger.

He was no less sensitive to the great symbolic power of circumcision. It was seen as a kind of counter to the centrality of baptism in the church: a rite that ensured a child’s “salvation” through entry into a religious covenant. For Hasdai Crescas, circumcision acted as an atonement for original sin, as powerful an atonement as the binding of Isaac (or, by contrast, as the sacrifice of Jesus for Christians). In *Kelimat ha-goyim*, Duran explains that Christians baptize their children to remove original sin: “And they believe that it is because of this sin that man is distant from God and turns his life from Him and His apprehension; punishment [for this sin sending] his soul to Gehinnom—until our father Abraham came and was commanded concerning circumcision, which returns man to the grace of God.”¹⁹

Because of its association with Abraham, circumcision was also closely identified with belief in the oneness of God, as in *Guide* III.49: a “covenant made by Abraham our father with a view to the belief in the unity of God.”²⁰ Moses Narboni follows Maimonides in this, writing: “Each doctrine requires a certain act that maintains it; thus the perfect Torah—which for every true opinion knows the action particular to it and by which it maintains itself—has provided for us the holy commandments: for instance, circumcision, which shows the unity of God.”²¹ For contemporaries of Narboni, who like Duran was

born in Perpignan and lived in northern Iberia, the unity versus the trinity of God was a burning issue, far more so than it had been for Maimonides, in whose Islamic cultural environment the dominant theology fully coincided with Jewish doctrine on this particular matter. Circumcision, then, was a kind of “outward and visible sign” of a primary inward belief, a belief that *conversos* might cling to in their rejection of the Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity. This is undoubtedly what Duran has in mind by associating circumcision with “the seed of Abraham” and identifying it with the oneness of God, the central and most important of Jewish dogmas.

In his 1966 monograph maintaining that the forced converts of 1391 slid quickly and easily into their new Christian lives, Benzion Netanyahu cites, among other things, a line in Duran’s eulogy: “And since He saw that some of them were lax with regard to repentance, He said ‘*when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest*,’ because it was thought that this group leaves the category of the Jewish people, which God has chosen as His legacy.”²² To Netanyahu, this quite reasonably suggests that the *conversos* were not secretly observing Jewish rituals.²³ Yet Duran here is not chastising the *conversos*, he is defending them. Since it is not possible to lead an observant life as a *converso*, he invokes the obligation to seize the first opportunity to repent—presumably, given the circumstances, by fleeing the country and returning to the open practice of Judaism. In the meantime, however, despite not being able to observe the commandments or to “return to Judaism,” they are still justified internally by their continuing belief in the truth of Judaism. And it is this internal state that defines whether the *converso* belongs to the Jewish people or not. As his use of the passage in *Menahot* underlines, “rejoicing in evil” is a category of sin that does *not* apply to them.

The gist of the lines quoted by Netanyahu would thus seem to be: yes, some have not returned to Judaism, and it might be thought that they do not wish to, that they rejoice in their sin. If that were so, they would indeed no longer be part of the “seed of Abraham,” no longer included in the national redemption. But that is not the case, according to Duran: “It says [in *Menahot*]: ‘In that moment [Abraham] tore his clothes and wept, he said: Perhaps, God forbid, they have no solution.’ And the answer comes: ‘A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit, etc.’ (Jer. 11:16). The [rabbis] explained: an olive, its body is like its point. And Rashi explained: ‘it is all cooked together. So, too, Israel, its body is like its point’—meaning that the salvation and redemption awaited by us will encompass the seed of Abraham, both those upon whom the

decree of apostasy has fallen, who were ‘*broken, trapped and taken captive*’ (Is. 8:15), and those ‘*who subscribe by hand to the Lord and are called by the name of Israel*’ (Is. 44:5).”²⁴ Even though some are “trapped” and are no longer called by their proper name, it is only the “name” that differentiates them. They do not “rejoice”—and they, too, are part of the group that will be redeemed.

Now Duran elaborates, comparing the two earlier exiles, in Egypt and in Babylonia, to the present long exile, and concluding: “In this great present exile, if a part of the people has stumbled in a similar manner under absolute duress, because of fear for their lives, this has not removed them from the category of God’s people and the seed of Abraham who loved Him, for God knows the secrets of their hearts, and He will redeem them with the rest of their brothers and will bear them forevermore.”²⁵ This passage not only defends the *conversos*’ reason for “sinning”—namely, fear for their lives—but also expresses full conviction that “the secrets of their hearts” will justify them before God. Again the focus is on the inner life of the individual—as it is again still later when Duran encourages the *conversos* to retain their loyalty and addresses their despair in soaring language, explicitly reassuring those who have become “mixed with the nations” that their redemption, too, will come:

And there is a hint of this [redemption] at the end of the song which the lord of the prophets [Moses] gave as testimony for the children of Israel. He said: “*Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people: for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries, and will be merciful unto His land, and to His people*” [Deut. 32:43], meaning, those called “*nations*” [together with] His people. He meant the portion of the people who were mixed with the nations will give praise and acknowledgment to Him may He be blessed, for “*the blood of His servants*” spilled for the sanctification of His name “*will rise and render vengeance to His adversaries.*” And they [“*His adversaries*”] are those who compel the people and their oppressors. And [the phrase], “*will be merciful unto His land and to His people*” means that when they return to the land it will atone for their sins, their crimes and their errors, for it is one of its virtues to atone for the sins of the people [b. Ket. 111].²⁶

The final passages of the eulogy continue the theme of justification by inner truth, alluding, as I mentioned earlier, to the parable of the seed

found in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* (IV.23). Daniel J. Lasker has summarized the parable's meaning: "The religion of Moses is like a seed. The religions which came after Judaism will eventually become like Judaism, even if temporarily they appear to overwhelm their source, just as earth, water, and soil overwhelm the seed. Christianity and Islam are, in truth, a preparation for the messiah, who is the fruit, and they will become his fruit. If they accept the messiah, they will become one tree; then the nations will revere the root which they had previously despised."²⁷ Duran, for his part, transfers Halevi's parable to the forced converts and the Christians among whom they dwell, emphasizing yet again the essential identity between "Jews" and "*conversos*." He writes:

There is a hint [Deut. 32:43] of these sorrows that will be the last for the people and of the final redemption for which we hope, and the strength and the intensification of the sorrows is proof of the blossoming of the healing of salvation. And so the great sage Judah Halevi made a parable about it: "*God has a secret cleaving and a wise design concerning us, like the wisdom hidden in the seed of wheat or one of the other seeds which is sown in the earth, for it first transforms and changes in appearance into earth and water and the rest of the elements, as though it were corrupted so that one who looks down upon it and does not know its matter and its good purpose thinks that it has gone into corruption such that no perceptible sign and no trace remains of it. But the divine faculty from the power and the form is in it, so the species is preserved by generating what is similar to it. Here it will be the opposite: it will transform earth and water and the rest of the elements to its own nature, transform them stage by stage to its own essence, rejecting husks and that which is not its essence from it, and when the heart is purified and suitable the divine faculty will fall on it and the form of the first seed, producing fruit like the fruit from which it was a seed.*"²⁸

After recounting the parable, Duran explains how he applies it to the case of the *conversos*:

And such is the situation with us, the inheritors of the perfect Torah equally, such that we have not changed from ourselves into something else, in a true change, but only that which is like the appearance of the husk and the outer shell. The core and the essence and the *divine faculty* are preserved *in potentia* even though we seem to be corrupted and transformed into something else, like the matter of the seed, until its blossoming will be seen in the future and the situation [then] will be the reverse [of the situation now], to return the rest of the nations to our faith and to reveal the *divine faculty*. This is what the prophet alluded to when he said about the future redemption,

“For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, [so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations]” [Is. 61:11].²⁹

The redemption Duran envisions is one where *conversos* will be saved equally with those who have remained Jews in name. In addition, although at the moment the *conversos* are apparently lost, they will yet arise and blossom. There is no suggestion here that the forced converts should return to Judaism now. Like the seed sown in the earth that disappears only to sprout later in the season, there they will remain until, at the time of divine redemption, they will emerge from the peoples among whom they have been deposited. Their presence among those nations will even have had a transformative effect, so that the nations too will accept the true messiah when he comes and will “turn to [the Jewish] faith.”

Duran’s theology of redemption would thus seem to require no fleeing from one’s place and no immediate, formal “return to Judaism.” A *converso* in his situation need only be willing to identify himself as a Jew, ideally by virtue of observing the rite of circumcision but fundamentally by keeping faith with every inner resource at his command. Having never relinquished their belief in the unity of God or their inner intention to serve him, the *conversos* have not been evil in a final, capital sense. Indeed, when we compare Duran’s sympathy for them with his reproaches of those Jews whose observance lacks intention, the former actually seem to occupy a superior spiritual level. It is, after all, those Jews without *kavvanah* who are responsible for the present sufferings, and thus in some measure for the forced conversions as well.

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM

Duran concludes with a consideration of the messianic redemption, as discussed in Chapter 4, a redemption that includes the production of a “wondrous” disposition to intellection among the Jewish people. This highly rationalist image of messianic miracle working in history leads into Duran’s concluding passages, where he neatly shifts back to the subject of the eulogy:

And since this is the final purpose and the end of man, insofar as he is an individual man, the coming of the redemption is desired by the choice ones of the people by their perfection of the disposition to this

conjunction. They will not yearn to seek the corporeal pleasures of the world, that they fill their bellies with meat and wine. And since this conjunction and unification will be perfected, for those who perfect themselves, after death, the day of death is greater for them than the day of birth, and it is what was said, *a good name, etc.* and to this light it hinted when it said “*And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*”³⁰ And since the levels of the perfect ones vary in this light, he compared the light of *the wise*—who are the perfect ones whose level did not reach the point of emanating [light] to others—to *the brightness of the firmament*, which is a brightness weaker than the brightness of the star, since light is not emanated from it to something else. And he compared the light of *those who turn many to righteousness*—the perfect ones who did reach the level of emanating upon others—to the *stars*, whose level is such that light is emanated from them to others.³¹

As noted, Duran does not refer only to the redemption of the people as a whole, or to a physical redemption in which the people might sate themselves with the “corporeal pleasures of the world, that they fill their bellies with meat and wine.” Instead he describes a redemption, both personal and spiritual, of the “choice ones”: a redemption consisting of “conjunction and unification” with the divine, and occurring after death. But by this means we come back at the close of the eulogy to its subject, Abraham ha-Levi himself. He, in Duran’s rhetoric, has achieved just such a personal redemption by completing the intellectual endeavors in which he engaged on this earth, purifying his disposition to intellectual apprehension and thereby achieving in death a true sanctification of God.

What is the meaning of this peroration, and what especially does Duran have in mind by redefining the “sanctification of God’s name”—the rabbinic term for martyrdom—in this way? Marc Saperstein has suggested that Duran is replying directly to the idea that “each Jew should be prepared not only to give his life as a martyr, but literally to sacrifice his children for God if the occasion demanded.”³² That position was associated most immediately with Hasdai Crescas, who, according to a (later) anonymous sermon, had asserted that “All those who want to be from the seed of Abraham must be prepared to offer their lives for the sanctification of God’s Name when the proper time comes. Otherwise they are not from the seed of Abraham. That is why all of the righteous and virtuous Jews martyred themselves: to demonstrate that they were from the seed of Abraham and Isaac.”³³ Saperstein interprets the numerous repetitions in the eulogy of the phrase “this

did not remove them from the category of the seed of Abraham”³⁴ as a mark of Duran’s express intention to rebut Crescas’s opinion,³⁵ an opinion evidently circulated widely enough to appear in a sermon decades later. If indeed Crescas’s extreme position—which Saperstein connects with the death of Crescas’s own son during the 1391 riots—was well known, it is reasonable to suppose that Duran would have wished to respond to it as he did in a public form, soon after his own forced conversion and that of many of his generation. Similarly, Duran’s rereading of “the sanctification of God’s name” as personal salvation based on intellectual purification and elevation may have been intended to repudiate any suggestion that physical martyrdom in the face of conversion was the sole means of meriting redemption.

Duran did defend the *conversos*—and, in so doing, himself as well. His reiterated emphasis on “intention” as opposed to “deed” in religious observance makes perfect sense in the context of a life where Christian worship—in the mind of one who had retained his loyalty to the Jewish faith—was meaningless but Jewish practice could only have been sporadic. And Duran was not alone in extending sympathy to the forced converts. It has been argued that many remaining Jews actively came to their aid, helping them either to return to Judaism or to live a partly Jewish life. In Mark Meyerson’s words, “The *conversos* became a focus for Jewish piety. Aiding the *conversos* was a positive act of faith and an affirmation of Jewish identity.”³⁶

Duran’s view of himself and of his own life and motivations in the immediate aftermath of 1391 is brought out vividly in these passages of the eulogy, which are clearly informed by impulses both philosophical and religious. No less clearly, they have a strong polemical intent—both to repudiate the Christian triumphalist message that God’s favor has departed from the Jews, and to counter Jewish demoralization. “They taunt [us] because of the delays in the coming of Your messiah,” Abraham Rimokh, a veteran of the Tortosa disputation, complains bitterly in his commentary on Psalms; “they mock us by saying that the time of the Torah has passed,” and they “scorn us when they see our humiliations,” to the point where “we are almost despaired of redemption.” Rimokh describes the despair even of the Jewish spokesmen at Tortosa: “many of our leaders abandoned their faith saying to each other, ‘our hope is lost, none sees me.’”³⁷ Joshua ha-Lorqi expresses similar sentiments.³⁸

For Duran himself, the apparent loss of Jewishness is a “corruption” only to one “who does not know” the inner state. His situation

as a still relatively new *converso* may not be precisely the same as that of Jews “called by the name of Jacob,” but like other *conversos*, he thinks of the boundary between himself and them as fluid. They are one in spirit if not in externals—“inheritors of the Torah equally.” Inwardly, Jews and *conversos* are indeed one people. In this respect, Duran’s eulogy also serves as a counter to attempts by Christian authorities to make Jewish identity dependent on and identical with outer appearance and garb.

David Nirenberg has suggested that “Sephardic rabbis writing after 1391 . . . came to rely less on intention and more on lineage.”³⁹ Duran seems to rely on both. His repeated references to the seed of Abraham may be allusions to Crescas’s sermon, or they may be expressions of a perspective indebted to that of Judah Halevi, itself reminiscent of the genealogical tendencies noted by Nirenberg. Descent from Abraham gives Jews and *conversos* alike the presumption of a common redemption; internal belief in the Jewish God provides a path to individual redemption.

In the eulogy, Duran is implacable on the subject of the religious derelictions of nominal Jews whose actions are performed without *kavvanah*. He attacks them for lacking any kind of “intention” in daily observance, a state that he associates with abandonment of the belief in God and that he holds at least partly accountable for the afflictions visited on God’s flock. By contrast, his relatively lenient view of the forced *conversos*—for whom, he suggests, the mere observance of the rite of circumcision suffices for redemption—is based on confidence in their inner sincerity, their intention. The Maimonidean identification of the commandment of circumcision with the belief in the unity of God makes this sign of Abraham’s covenant inclusive. Duran’s reliance on it creates a new, simplified community of *conversos*, potentially marked outwardly by the sign of circumcision but certainly marked inwardly by belief in the unity of God.

Does he thereby also excuse the life they lead? At the very least, he defends them from accusations of faithlessness. The secrets of their hearts will justify them, atoning for their outward apostasy. By adopting *kavvanah* as the defining factor in Jewish identity, Duran has solved his own circumstantial problem as well: for him, too, the outer form of a nominal Christian does not signify the inner truth. By stamping mechanical observance of the commandments as not only insufficient but indeed potentially pernicious and harmful, he has leveled the playing field between Jew and *converso*: the performance of a

few commandments with full and passionate intention by a *converso* becomes superior to the perfunctory performance of many commandments by an unconverted Jew. His notion of Jewish identity is a very pure one, dependent neither on societal classifications based on dress, profession, or pattern of life nor on the then-current rabbinic dividing line between Jew and apostate (namely, ritual observance or outward “return to Judaism”). In depending rather on common descent from Abraham and on internal adherence to Jewish doctrine, it rejects both Christian definitions and Jewish law as the arbiter of Jewishness, arguing instead for an identity that is to some extent self-generated and self-imposed.

It remains to be said again that we are still only two years past the trauma of 1391, whose psychic inroads can be detected in the anxious and perhaps overly emphatic assertions of the eulogy. Still to come, a decade later, is the mature working out of Duran’s ideas in *Ma’aseh Efod*, to which we next turn.

The True Wisdom of the Torah

Ma'aseh Efod

Ma'aseh Efod is by far the most important of Duran's writings, and it represents the clearest expression we have of his vision and beliefs.¹

In this apparently innocuous work of Hebrew grammar, with its unusually substantial introduction, Duran encodes a double message. A man who in cold reality is living as a Christian, he appears intent on presenting himself as a moderate, traditional, thoroughly Jewish guide to his chosen subject. His philosophical language is normative, his cited references are nearly exclusively to Jewish sources, and his "we" is the we of the Jewish community. Whereas most *converso* literature is written in the vernacular and negotiates the boundary between *converso* and Christian by means of irony, coded language, and other rhetorical techniques, Duran writes, exclusively in Hebrew, for a double audience made up not of *conversos* and Christians but of fellow *conversos* and Jews.² Aiding him in this endeavor is the fact that, for this first generation of forced converts, Jewish knowledge, including knowledge of Hebrew, had not yet been attenuated—and the converts themselves might still be said to enjoy a presumption of "innocence."³

The message, as we will see, takes the form of a religious system based not on performance of the commandments but on a curriculum of study and intensive contemplation. The message is almost hidden, its radical nature masked by Duran's conservative terminology, reasonable tone, and reliance on conventional, middle-of-the-road, and universally respected exemplars of medieval Hebrew thought and religious philosophy.⁴ Duran is meticulous, almost obsessive, in

citing biblical proofs and in alluding almost as copiously to canonical rabbinic literature. Throughout, the writing and the orientation are deeply infused with the Maimonideanism of his intellectual world.

First, a very brief summary. In the introduction, Duran argues that the ultimate purpose of Jewish religious life is to study and internalize the Hebrew Bible, a discipline the key to which lies in mastery of Hebrew grammar. The main, properly grammatical, portion of the work then proceeds systematically: first, some prefatory chapters that include a definition of language *per se* (ch. 1), the purpose (final cause) of language (2), the efficient cause of language (3), the parts of speech (4), vocalization (5), the speech organs of man (6), the current insufficiency of Hebrew vocabulary (7), and the science of grammar (8). These are followed by the properly grammatical material, that is, nouns (9), verbs (10–12), prefixes (13), interchanged letters (14), verb forms (*binyanim*) (15–22), quadrilateral verbs (23), types of nouns (24), how to find verb roots and nouns and particles in Scripture (25), epithets and pronouns (26), principles that aid in the understanding of Scripture (27–28), understanding scriptural sentences where the words are out of order (29), particles (30), the nature of *begeḏ kefet* letters (31), our deficiencies in pronouncing Hebrew (32), and why Hebrew is called the holy tongue (33).

In its grammatical aspect, *Ma'aseh Efod* takes its place within a long tradition, from Saadia's *Kitāb al-luḡha* (*Sefer Tzaḥot ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit*) through Jonah ibn Janah's *Kitāb al-luma'* (*Sefer ha-Riqmah*) and *Kitāb al-uṣūl* (*Sefer ha-Shorashim*) and David Kimḥi's *Mikhlol* to the *Retuqot Kesef* of Duran's direct predecessor, Joseph ibn Kaspi, whose logical exposition of Hebrew grammar may also have influenced Duran's similarly constructed if far more elaborate discussion.⁵

But *Ma'aseh Efod* is about much more than the rules and details of grammar, important as they are to Duran. The introduction alone contains an entire curriculum of study, as well as Duran's advice for going about such study; material relating to the place of philosophy and kabbalah; and an evaluation of the role of the commandments. The body of the treatise is then studded with passages both long and short that diverge from the ostensible subject at hand to offer comments on a multitude of topics: not just the nature of language in general but the origin of Hebrew, the particular place of Hebrew Scripture in the order of the universe, and the potency of words—in particular the Tetragrammaton—in the working of miracles by a prophet and

his reception of the divine prophetic efflux. In these digressions from orderly presentation, Duran comes back repeatedly to the words of Scripture, to which he attributes a kind of rationalized magical power and on the basis of which he appears to predicate his renewal of Jewish consciousness, education, and culture.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to unpacking Duran's lengthy introduction, his most expansive and detailed laying out of his postconversion philosophy. The following chapter delves into the work's magical elements and their implications.

WISDOM AND DEED

Sermon-like, the introduction of *Ma'aseh Efod* opens with exegesis: a reading of Psalm 19:7–9. In Duran's explanation, the first half of the first verse offers a general statement about the "Torah" of the Lord:

*"The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul (Ps. 19:8)."*⁶ It is among the principles of the perfect Torah—which is the Torah of the Lord; there is no other—that for man (and Israel, called man), there is a reality more perfect than this [worldly] reality, and it is the ultimate, eternal happiness, immeasurably greater and more elevated than any [happiness] in this our life, as it is said in b. *Berakhot* 34b, regarding the phrase "[*For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, [what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him]*" (Is. 64:3). The way to attain it, leading to it, is to keep the divine Torah and to perform its commandments. This is what is meant [by the verse] "*For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land*" (Deut 32:47): by keeping the Torah, they will attain eternal life, which is [both] absolute "life" and length of days upon this earth. And [another verse]: "*And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day*" (Deut. 6:24). [We can interpret] the phrase "*for our good always*" to mean arriving at the world which is entirely long, which is an eternal state; [and we can interpret the other phrase] "*to preserve us alive, as it is at this day*" as referring to the corporeal state, as Maimonides wrote in his honored treatise (*Guide* III.27), and as this is the purpose of the divine Torah, the sweet singer [David] said, "*the Torah of the Lord, etc.*" (Ps. 19:8).⁷

Despite Duran's out-and-out declaration here, at the very beginning of the book, that "the way to attain [immortality] is to keep the divine Torah and to perform its commandments," he does not mean to equate

these two activities—keeping and performing—by accepting the traditional interpretation that the way to keep the Torah is precisely by performing the commandments. Rather, as in the parallel positions staked out in the eulogy discussed in the previous chapter, he will define them as two separate categories—study (“wisdom”) and observance (“deed”)—of which the latter will be radically devalued.

But first Duran interprets the discrete elements of the Torah’s “perfect” teaching as, in his reading, they are epitomized in Psalm 19:8–10: “The Torah of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the *testimony* of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The *statutes* of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the *commandment* of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The *fear* of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the *judgments* of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

As he explains it, the “testimony” mentioned in these verses refers to the narrative portion of the Bible (stories of creation, etc.), stories that are “sure” since, unlike the case with other peoples’ Scriptures, they have no errors in them. The “statutes” refer to the *hukim*, those divine commands (like the sacrificial service or the construction of the Temple) whose reasons, although not given to man, contain secrets of existence, and whose performance serves to bring down the divine efflux by which they perfect the human intellect and bring “joy.” Distinct from them are the “commandments” as such: positive injunctions whose performance instills correct ethical qualities and attitudes and thereby perfects the human character. “Fear” consists in warnings against the performance of what is forbidden; just as the positive commandments induce love of God, these induce awe, and are “clean” inasmuch as they deter men from sullyng actions. Finally, the “judgments” are those commandments intended for kings, rulers, and judges; they are “true and righteous” because agreed on by all and necessitated by reason.

In brief, Duran categorizes the Torah into *aggadic* (narrative) passages and *halakhic* (legal) passages. The latter are either “irrational” or “rational,” and the latter of these are either ethical-intellectual or civil-social in character.⁸

But, he observes, the method of apprehending this Torah is not obvious and is subject to controversy. Some—reverting to the previous chapter, we may think of them as Jews without *kavvanah*—hold that the essential thing is “deed,” doing that which is commanded, and that the degree of felicity thereby attained is proportional to the number and quality of the commandments performed. They may even

claim that just as God put virtues and powers in existent things for the purpose of healing people physically, so too did he put virtues and powers in the commandments to ward off spiritual illness and preserve the health of the soul. Moreover, just as “occult virtues” in medical drugs work in ways hidden from us, the means by which keeping the commandments brings immortality is likewise hidden from us.⁹ The important thing, these people insist, is what you do. Moreover, they point out, Scripture seems to confirm this emphasis on observance in its many warnings against not doing one thing or another, and its equally frequent admonitions to keep the commandments.

Duran’s dissent from this position is arrived at by way of extending it. He cites a further subgroup of unnamed persons who contend that even when you perform a commandment without the intention to fulfill the will of the One who commands, or without directing pure thought to him, you will still achieve the final purpose of the Torah. These persons, too, appeal to the example of medicine, where intention on the part of either doctor or patient is not necessary for healing. Drugs work on their own—and this (in the opinion of such people) is why the Tosefta ascribes a portion in the world to come to the righteous of the Gentiles, since, presumably, their performance of a commandment lacks any intention of fulfilling the will of the God of Israel.

Turning explicit, Duran repudiates this second opinion as invalid. An action without intention, he writes, is utterly void, and no resort to fanciful examples will prove otherwise. In particular, the analogy with medical drugs is unsound: the actions of drugs are natural, while the commandments (he asserts, strikingly) “are actions of intellect and thought.”¹⁰ As for the righteous of the nations who merit a portion in the world to come, they are not only fulfilling the Bible’s seven Noahide commandments but also intend to obey the will of the One who commanded these things at Sinai.

In brief, observing a commandment without intention will not advance one toward attaining the purposes of the Torah, and especially not its primary purpose. As Duran notes, the rabbis in many passages of the Talmud and Midrash emphasize in no uncertain terms the need for intention in performing the commandments. And here he introduces a different point of view, one that he ultimately affirms.

The Torah, Duran writes, has two goals: immortality of the soul and welfare of the body. There are two ways of achieving each of them: through the path called “deed” (*ma‘aseh*) and through the path

called “wisdom” (*hokhmah*). The initial purpose of the Torah is the welfare of the body, and this is attained by performing deeds. The subsequent and far more important purpose of the Torah is the welfare of the soul, and this is attained by means of wisdom. The two parts of man, body and soul, are therefore perfected by the Torah, and one should be intent on achieving proficiency in both while being mindful of their relative places in the hierarchy of importance.

And there are some who see that since the purposes of the Torah are twofold, initial [purpose] and final [purpose], as has been posited, so achieving them follows from the Torah in two ways, namely, through wisdom and deed. And the first [purpose] and part of the second [purpose] will be achieved by deed, and the second and part of the first by wisdom. And this is so because man is composed of two parts, body and soul, and the initial purpose—for the body—is through deed, and the final [purpose]—for the soul—is through wisdom. This is recompense for the two parts of man, by which he is perfected, deed and wisdom. Admonishing us to worship the Lord, may He be blessed, with these two parts, Scripture says: “*Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God*” (Deut. 18:13), meaning that you should be perfect in His worship with your two parts, namely, body and soul.¹¹ . . . All of these writings teach that what is desired by the Torah is other than deed [alone]. It is [instead] wisdom, which is the most perfect portion of the Torah, even though deed, performed more perfect[ly] and with a purer soul, follows from it.

Such is the opinion of the sages (b. Kidd. 40a) who considered and concluded that “Talmud” [i.e., occupation with Torah] was great because it brings to deed, not that deed is the purpose of “Talmud”—for if that were the case, deed would be greater, for the purpose is more important than that which is prior to it, and an enlightened one should not equate these different things. But instead the sages say that with perfection and a [high] level of “Talmud”—which, from the point of view of itself, is what is desired and is the important purpose—there follows also perfection of deed with a pleasing intention. Therefore they do say that [“Talmud”] brings [one] to deed, but not that this is “for the sake of deed,” for that would teach that [deed] was the sole purpose and this is not the case.

Behold, this belief is the most proper and [it is] close to the belief that the soul’s divine service is the engagement in “wisdom” and the occupation with it.¹²

In the end, then, Duran argues that while there are two purposes to the Torah, they are not identical in importance. The first and lesser is the performance of the commandments, and the second and superior is gaining knowledge of the “wisdom of the Torah.” Obtaining this latter is the ultimate goal of “man” (identified with Israel in the very

first lines of *Ma'aseh Efod*), and that goal is immortality. Not only is performance of the commandments secondary, but one may fulfill the ultimate goal of the Torah, namely, immortality of the soul, as well as a part of the “first” (but less important) goal of bodily welfare without, seemingly, any “deed” at all.¹³

In a sense, what Duran has done is to separate out two phrases traditionally understood to form a single unit: “keeping the Torah” and “performing the commandments.” Although he uses them in parallel to describe *the* way to eternal life, the terms are not equivalent. Rather, “keeping the Torah” becomes identified with attaining “wisdom of the Torah” and thereby eternal felicity, while “performing the commandments” is confined to the inferior religious goal of corporeal welfare. Thus, when he comes at the end of this passage to discuss the question of what the “wisdom of the Torah” entails, the issue of observance has already been effectively shelved; performance of the commandments, while desirable, is not the most important part of the Jewish religious system called “Torah.”

It is instructive to compare Duran’s treatment here with that of Maimonides in *Guide* III.27, where the “first” goal, observance of the Law, must be fulfilled as a preliminary to achieving the “ultimate” goal of intellectual perfection. While his terms are similar, Duran is far more interested in reaching the conclusion that the two goals are not of equal worth.

In the sequel, I consider why this is so.

THREE REJECTED VIEWS

With preliminaries concluded, Duran brings his reader to the crux of the matter. If wisdom of the Torah is the path to ultimate felicity, what precisely should be the *content* of this wisdom? He answers by describing, and finally discarding, three views of what the true “wisdom of the Torah” consists in. The three views are held by, respectively, Talmudists, philosophers, and kabbalists. Not surprisingly each group advocates its own favored body of writings and traditions.¹⁴

The first group is made up of masters of the science of the Talmud.¹⁵ In a strikingly philosophical description, Duran explains how those who claim that Talmud—that is, the in-depth study and mastery of the Talmudic text—constitutes the wisdom of the Torah base themselves on the further claim that such study brings man to ultimate felicity. Not only do rabbinic sayings themselves suggest that

such study is an “essential cause” of man’s eternal happiness, but there is an “intellectual proof [of this] according to the principles of the Torah”: since the commandments are what God has lovingly bequeathed to the people of Israel, the greatest merit obtains in coming to understand those commandments in all their complexity and profundity. The final argument on behalf of Talmud is a fully philosophical one:

Furthermore, the particular differentiating characteristic of man is his intellectual faculty; by this [faculty] he is set apart from the animals. Eternal immortality and ultimate felicity are necessarily [attained] by means of this faculty, which makes man human. Everything that brings this potentiality to actuality and increases light and radiance in its attainment makes man more disposed to receive this immortality—assuming that [immortality] is attained by perfecting the intellect. And Talmudic investigation, on account of its depth and the difficulty of mastering it, adds light and radiance to the intellect, bringing [the intellect] forth from the dark and shadow of foolishness by endowing the intellect with acuteness and argumentative skill in this deep investigation; [and it does this] more than the rest of the sciences.¹⁶

Duran stipulates that these are very strong claims. But some Talmudists go too far, rejecting the study of any other science or kind of knowledge and predicting that anyone engaging in it will spend his days uselessly and end in Gehinnom. To illustrate, he quotes at some length a textual interpretation apparently elaborated by Talmudists as a polemic against the secular sciences.

The text is Psalm 1:1–2: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night.” Writes Duran: the term “wicked” in these Talmudists’ exegesis of the first verse refers to those who know Greek natural science.¹⁷ The “sinners” are those who know Greek metaphysics, and entertain dreadful opinions about God’s knowledge of particulars and divine providence. The “scornful” engage in “mocking, jesting, and song,” presumably the rhetorical arts. The second verse, giving the preferred occupations, refers twice to the law, which means therefore both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. (Duran pauses here to note that some even say that occupation with Scripture itself is a waste, and refutes this claim with the well-known rabbinic statement to the effect that a man should give a third of his time to Scripture, a third to Mishnah, and a third to Gemara.)

As against these extremists, pious and presumably admirable Talmudists say that ultimate felicity for man can be attained and perfected with the science of the Talmud as long as it is done with a pleasing intention, namely, that one strives to perfect the soul and to approach God in order to serve and fulfill his will and out of love of his Torah, and that one's thought be pure and stripped of any other intention whatsoever. One should not engage in Talmud study in order to be called rabbi, or to gain power, or to be able to dominate the rich by means of the power of excommunication, or to acquire money and property. If those conditions are met, according to the members of this group, the science of Talmud will indeed bring one to perfection.

Duran then performs a bit of rhetorical sleight of hand. While apparently defending the Talmudist position, he fundamentally undermines it by citing a possible objection—namely, the inclusion within the Gemara of both narrative portions and rejected opinions, neither of which might be regarded as conducive to one's intellectual perfection. His "answer" to this objection is that the term "Talmud" must be construed differently. The Talmud that is beneficial for the soul is not the extant text of the Gemara: "Do you really think that the wisdom of Solomon was the attainment of knowledge of this treatise that was written more than 1,300 years after him?"¹⁸ What, Duran asks, about all the sages who lived before the completion of the text and who were said to have studied "Talmud"? No, what is really intended by "Talmud," he asserts, is "the true investigation of the judgments [rulings] of the commandments of God, with the faculty of the intellect, to bring forth one thing from another and to understand by means of the thirteen hermeneutical rules and to encompass what was received from Moses at Sinai concerning some of the biblical judgments that are not mentioned in the Bible, or only just hinted at."¹⁹

That is to say, Talmud is not the study of the text of the Talmud as we have it but instead the study of the commandments given in the Bible, using the intellect for logical reasoning, being guided by the thirteen rules for the interpretation of the Torah, and taking into consideration the laws transmitted orally by God (presumably, the Mishnah) along with the scriptural text. Thus, without precisely dismissing the claims of the Talmudists, Duran transmutes their field of study into something almost unrecognizable: almost, one might say, a kind of Bible study.

This brings us to the second group of thinkers: those who argue that the true wisdom of the Torah consists in philosophy. Duran refers to these as men who follow in the footsteps of Aristotle while remaining, “in their own opinion, among those who follow the Torah of Moses.”

They want to join together these two opposing things and think that there is [only] an incidental benefit in the acquisition of ultimate felicity through deed [observance of the commandments] since [ultimate felicity] is the ethical perfection of the soul, which will be prepared [through] the perfection of the logical, mathematical, natural, and metaphysical sciences in the way that the sages of Greece posited in their books. These secrets in their opinion inhere in the Torah. Natural sciences are called [in Hebrew] “The Account of Creation” and metaphysical sciences are called “The Account of the Chariot.” And they are secrets of the Torah which the sages enjoin studying. They are a cause of immortality and eternity for the soul, bringing it from potentiality to actuality by acquiring the intelligibles. The intellect that apprehends the intelligibles and is constituted from them is called the acquired intellect. Their claim is that there is nothing in existence aside from God and His deeds, and so perfection of the soul comes from knowing Him and His deeds. And knowing Him is knowing His attributes and how they are predicated of Him and the knowledge of His oneness and the way existence is necessitated from Him and His creation and His guidance of existent things and His knowledge of them. And everything of this kind in metaphysics and the knowledge of His deeds is knowledge that derives from all that exists apart from Him: the knowledge of matter and form and the knowledge of the heavens and the elements and that which is composed of them by way of minerals, and vegetables, and animals, and rational beings, and the efficient and material and formal and final causes of all of them, both distant and proximate, and the knowledge of the benefits of the limbs of animals and all that is mentioned in the book *Benefits of the Limbs* and other things of the knowledge of the parts of existence. And these are a cause of acquiring ultimate felicity, since from the perfection of the works one knows the perfection of the Maker.²⁰

In brief, the philosophers’ position boils down to the principle that one learns about the nature of God from the study of his creation, that is, nature itself. To put it in terms of disciplines, physics leads to metaphysics. This sounds very much like the Duran we encountered in Chapters 3 and 4: the Duran of the commentary on the *Guide* and the philosophical *responsa*. But here one is immediately struck by the negative inflection even in the ostensibly “descriptive” part of Duran’s

discussion. In such phrases as “according to their opinion,” “they are of the opinion,” “this is their opinion,” phrases absent from his discussion of mainstream Talmudists, he unmistakably dissociates himself from these philosophers—as if, as may indeed have been the case, he were discomfited precisely by his closeness to them.

In his report of the putatively strongest argument in support of the philosophers, Duran cites their interpretation of the parable of the king’s palace from Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* III.51, and pointedly proceeds to rebut it.²¹ His rebuttal consists of an inventive rereading of the parable, based on the fact that Maimonides himself offers two different readings. Ignoring the category of those with no chance of reaching the inner rooms of the palace, Duran focuses on the three groups who come closest. One is walking around the walls of the palace, one has arrived in the antechamber, and one has reached the inner rooms but may or may not have beheld the face of the king.

The first time Maimonides explicates his own parable, he refers to those walking around the walls of the palace as “jurists” or Talmudists who study the law and do not engage in speculation about the roots of religion. The next group comprises those who do speculate about the roots of religion, while the members of the third are those who have achieved knowledge of logical demonstration. Then, turning to his reader, Maimonides explicates the groups a second time. Those walking outside the palace are now students of logic and mathematics, those in the antechamber have advanced to physics, and those in the inner rooms have mastered metaphysics.

Now for Duran’s exegesis. According to the philosophers’ interpretation of this parable, he writes, all Talmudists are consigned to the group explicitly named for them; their status, in this reading, is even lower than that of students of logic and mathematics, not to mention those who know physics and metaphysics.²² Implicit in this interpretation is that those who speculate about the roots of religion and those who attain demonstrative proofs (in the first set of three categories) are assimilated (in the second set of three categories) into those who study the sciences.

By contrast, Duran’s rereading argues for three categories of Talmudists corresponding to the three categories of students of the secular sciences. Those walking around the walls are beginners in Talmud study, parallel to those who study logic and mathematics (beginning subjects for would-be philosophers). Those Talmudists who have

entered the antechamber use their rabbinic training to engage in speculation, and those in the inner room itself have, also through study of the Talmud, achieved the level of demonstrative proof of God. Finally Duran argues on grammatical grounds that each group of Talmudists is actually *higher* than the corresponding group of philosophers.²³

What seems to exercise Duran is this: in contending that one can come to know God through the study of his creation (the cosmos), the philosophers appear to suggest that one can achieve intellectual perfection and thus immortality of the soul *solely* through the study of physics and metaphysics. If that is the true parabolic meaning of the Torah, by implication the study of philosophy can replace and is potentially even superior to the study of the Bible.

He concludes his arguments against the philosophers with a final, impassioned defense of Maimonides:

How could one say that [Maimonides] intended by this what the sages of Greece wrote? For he wrote in his greatest passages on metaphysics that regarding the knowledge of God and His providence the philosophers spoke great slander and stumbled in [these matters], and that there is no recovery for them, nor for anyone who is drawn after them in this. And he said that he would make known the errors and the mistakes that brought them to speak slander in this matter, and that he would make known the opinion of our Torah and how one may rebut their evil and nasty opinions. He revealed in his book how Aristotle's knowledge fell short regarding all that is above the sphere of the moon—you can find this in [*Guide*] II.22 and II.24—so how could Maimonides have said that this science brings you to ultimate felicity? And so, too, concerning natural science: how can knowledge of prime matter and time and motion—considering how uncertain is [the nature of] their existence—help you acquire joy that lasts? And also what [Maimonides] wrote about the proof of the existence of the first separate mover: that [proof] is entirely doubtful, as the later sages explained. Maimonides has said that Aristotle's opinions regarding the causes of the motions of the spheres, which bring the separate intellects into existence, have no demonstrative proof. How then can it seem to an enlightened person that Maimonides would say that these kinds of knowledge bring you to ultimate felicity—and that they are greater than the science whose foundations were given on the holy mountains, namely the divine speech with His scriptural commandments?²⁴

We saw in Chapter 3 that Maimonides takes a skeptical view of the possibility of attaining knowledge of the supralunar world and the separate intellects. As Duran hotly presents the issue here, the uncertainty of human arguments as compared with the absolute

certainty of the divine Word renders utterly risible the idea that in philosophy lies the true meaning of Judaism. He has thus begun this section by sneering at those “philosophers” who seek to harmonize the opposing systems of Judaism and philosophy and ended it with an encomium and justification of Maimonides as one who criticized philosophy. But does not his cry—that Maimonides could not possibly have believed that knowledge of the causes of celestial motion can bring one to felicity—ring false, especially considering how much effort Duran himself has expended in studying these very celestial motions?

Not quite. Duran intends to assault here not philosophical truth in general, or the principles of rationality by which one may judge truth, but the elevation of particular and actually unknown truths to the status of unquestioned truth. As he says later in the introduction, his fondness for mathematics quite visible, “do not think that it is my intention to seal the gate of investigation completely to the other well-known sciences for what is in them that is true in itself and demonstrably proven, as is the case with mathematics; the study of these [matters] is both permitted and [even] required insofar as they are useful for [understanding] the judgments of the Torah.”²⁵ He goes on to defend the study of logic for its usefulness in polemic, and even to say that studying physics and metaphysics is permitted, as long as one keeps in mind precisely those places where the Greek sages differ from the principles of the Torah.

In short, he wants to preserve his version of Maimonideanism, which sees philosophy as a crucial tool for understanding Scripture. What he rejects is the idea that philosophy can be a *replacement* for Scripture.

The third group is the kabbalists. Duran’s discussion here is briefer but more sympathetic. First, as with the other two groups, he presents their claims. According to the kabbalists, their tradition consists of divine secrets known to the patriarchs and passed on to Moses and to all the prophets and sages after them. The secrets concern the nature of divinity, angels, and wondrous things both divine and natural, none of which can be known by human “investigation” but only through this tradition. Unlike philosophy, kabbalah is particular to the Jewish people, and, Duran notes, there are

convincing hints about this tradition in both Scripture and rabbinic literature. Experts in it claim the ability to “change the natures of existent things and to create signs and wonders with the names of the Creator and the holy angels.”²⁶ The purpose of the commandments, which ideally should be performed in the Land of Israel but are nevertheless obligatory in the exile as well, is (in their account) to draw down divine emanation from “those holy existent things and the holy ones and the pure angels.”²⁷

Such are the claims of the kabbalists. But, Duran argues, even if their claims could be true, they do not provide any proof for them. Nor can they, since kabbalistic knowledge is supposedly superior to human reason and apprehended only through this “tradition.” And so he ultimately rejects kabbalah—but without concealing his sympathy: “In truth, the Torah and prophets and the sages very much agree with this opinion, more so than with the adherents of [rational] investigation [i.e., philosophers], and all the more so if what they say about changing the natures of things and the creation of signs is true. But what can we do? Already their opinions have become muddled, in this [field of knowledge] as well, and controversy and confusion have resulted. There is no consensus, [even] in some of their greatest expositions.”²⁸ The Talmud, at least, has rules to follow in interpreting things and sorting the correct from the incorrect; this particular field, by contrast, since there is no way of determining whose opinion is correct, holds the greatest danger of falling into error.²⁹ Duran’s criticism of the kabbalists, resting implicitly on the existence of but one truth, one true interpretation of Scripture, and one true way of understanding the secrets of the divine, rests more explicitly on the proposition that this truth, like any truth, should be susceptible of reasonable proof. There *should* be a way for the human intellect to weigh the truth claims of the kabbalists; the very denial that there is such a way counts heavily against them.

Perhaps most striking about Duran’s discussion of all three schools of thought is that his severest strictures are reserved for those within each of them who claim exclusive priority for their approach. However emphatically he states those strictures, they do not amount to blanket dismissals.³⁰ Here, too, his carefully preserved, middle-of-the road rationalism is the guiding principle of his discourse.

THE TORAH ITSELF

Finally, however, Duran turns to his own position. Wherein lies the true wisdom of the Torah to which Jews should devote themselves? It is not in Talmud as traditionally understood, nor is it in radical rationalist philosophy, nor is it in the teachings of kabbalah. It is, rather, in the Torah itself: in its actual text.

And that which seems to me better than all that which has been said [about the Talmudists, philosophers, and kabbalists], is that the science of the Torah is this Torah itself, and that constant occupation with it and keeping it in the heart and the contemplation of it and keeping its presence in the memory and not turning one's thought from it toward any other thing during the time one is occupied with it, all this directs a man straight to the ultimate eternal felicity and brings him to it. And this is not a cause of eternal felicity alone, for its matters are directed also to the imaginary [this-worldly] felicity, and one's quest for this [worldly success] will be attained from [the Torah] with the providence of the Lord over one, drawn [down] from occupation with the Torah in the aforementioned fashion, by the [occult] virtue that inheres in this divine Torah. And because of this it says: "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*" (Josh. 1:8). [This verse] says that if one meditates on the Torah constantly and its book does not depart from one's mouth and one fulfills deed from it, then "his ways will prosper"—meaning one's felicity in this world—and then "he will have good success"—meaning the achieving of eternal felicity which is entirely intellectual.

And the wonder is that it says "*and you shall meditate therein*"—for meditation alone, namely, reading it, is something that brings one to this by an [occult] virtue and all the more so if there is along with this a good understanding of what is meant by it and an apprehension of its depths and secrets. So the sweet singer [David] said in his Torah, "*and in His law doth he meditate day and night*" (Ps. 1:2). And the lord of the prophets [Moses] has said this is the matter in its essence: "*And [the book] shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life*" (Deut. 17:19). And the King commanded all Israel to read the Torah constantly: "*Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart*" (Deut. 11:18). And He said, "*And ye shall teach them to your children*" (Deut. 11:19). And He said, "*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them*" (Deut. 6:7).³¹

In Duran's system, the ideal is to have the text of the Hebrew Bible memorized, and to contemplate it and its inner meanings constantly.

He does offer a nod to the performance of the commandments (“one fulfills deed from it”), but as mentioned earlier, this leads to felicity in *this* world. But meditation alone, with understanding and knowledge of its inner meaning, will bring you to intellectual felicity, namely immortality. His exhortations regarding “keeping” and “remembering” are in the same category as those regarding teaching and learning. His proof texts focus on these terms: the commandments must be *kept*, the covenant (which Duran identifies with “Torah” itself) must be *kept*, the “Torah” must be *remembered*, the commandments must be *remembered*, and the words of the command should be “*in the heart*.” In brief, “keeping” the commandments and “keeping” the Torah should be understood as the study of commandments and Torah, and the same meaning should be ascribed to the phrases that enjoin “remembering” the commandments and “remembering” the Torah. All signify one thing: having the words of God’s command “in the heart.”

And this brings us back to Duran’s insistence earlier in the introduction to *Ma’aseh Efod* that ultimately “what is desired by the Torah is other than deed”—that intention is superior to deed. If he were writing in a different historical moment, this insistence might well be shrugged off as a quirk, or as merely theoretical. In the moment in which he is writing, we must keep in mind his audience—or, rather, his two audiences. For the system Duran proposes, which emphasizes the centrality of the Hebrew Bible in Jewish religious and intellectual culture and even places the text of the Hebrew Bible and its intellectual contemplation at the zenith of Jewish religiosity, can be read in two ways.

A “Jewish” reading would place Duran’s argument in the context of his concerns for the remaining Jewish community in Iberia: the Hebrew Bible should be at the center of a full Jewish educational curriculum, and serve the individual as a focus for meditation and intellectual worship of God alongside the required observance of the commandments. Another, “*converso*” reading would place the argument simultaneously in the context of Duran’s concern for the struggling community of which he was a member. A *converso* encountering this text might well have seen in it a powerful message of hope, a message that a life without observance, or with minimal observance, was not without religious value. What Duran is suggesting is nothing less than that such a *converso*, by devoting himself to the “wisdom of the Torah” and the intellectual worship of God, although he might not

enjoy all the material benefits of a Jewish life, would be fulfilling the most important purpose of Torah, and could thereby even be privileged to attain immortality.³²

INTERIORITY AND CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

As we have seen, this inner-oriented view of Judaism, in various forms, is expressed in many of Duran's postconversion writings. In the eulogy he defends the *conversos* on the grounds of their internal state of belief. In *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, he invokes the example of the Khazar king to highlight the difference between external observance and internal belief; in the same work, he contrasts invidiously the spirituality of the Jews with the materiality of the Christians, thus reversing a stereotypical charge leveled at Judaism by Christians themselves (a matter to which we shall soon return). *Ma'aseh Efod* can be read as expressing a more fully worked out and articulated version of a kind of *converso* religion: internally oriented and for the most part independent of the commandments.

Duran's literary and intellectual tools, even his general orientation toward the inner life, can all be traced to Jewish sources, and in particular to Maimonides. As I suggest in the following chapter, his ideas about "keeping the Torah in the heart" could have emerged quite organically out of Maimonides' comments on contemplation and "true worship" in *Guide* III.51. Nor was his fundamental distinction between inner religious life and external observance by any means new; beyond the rabbinic discussions he himself adduces in the introduction to *Ma'aseh Efod*, we need only note the long-standing medieval dichotomies of body and soul, deed and intention, duties of the body and duties of the heart. Even the priority of inner state over outer performance can be found in Jewish writings, homiletic and theological, from the Prophets to Duran's own time. It is, rather, in the particular circumstances of Duran's life as a *converso* that his privileging of intention over deed takes on radical implications.

Since, however, Duran lived in a Christian society, and in his later life very much so, and in that later life became engaged in reading Christian Scripture and theology, one is compelled to wonder whether he was also influenced by Christian thought and Christian spirituality. It is a question that may occur to readers of this book. For Christians (such readers might point out), the religion of "faith" had superseded Judaism, the old religion of "works." Is there then a basis

for suggesting that Duran's reworking of Jewish religiosity in a seemingly opposite direction reflects his immersion in Christian culture and his reading of Christian texts?

To answer this complex question, it would be relevant to observe, first, that Christian religiosity in late medieval Iberia was hardly a matter of faith alone. Christian practice was what we would familiarly call Catholic practice: marked by a plethora of regular observances like the sacraments (including the Eucharist and baptism), prayer and the recitation of creeds, confession and penances, fast days, Lent, and holiday rituals. John Edwards reports the impression made by these observances on one *converso*: "A *converso* tailor named Garcia López said, when coming out of church in Soria at Christmas 1498, just after the priest had announced the services for the week: 'When we were Jews, we were bored stiff by one Passover each year, and now each day seems to be a passover (*pascua*) and feast-day and it's all a burden and excessive.'" ³³ There were even parallels to be drawn between the two religions' practices: circumcision had a clear counterpart in baptism; the priestly blessing in the synagogue could be (and was) compared with the transubstantiation of the host during Mass. ³⁴ Even the constraints of kashrut had their parallel in the prohibition of meat on Fridays and during Lent.

In sum, it is not at all clear to what extent popular Christianity would have appeared to an outsider as a religion of faith rather than works. Nor was Judaism, for its part, so neglectful of "faith" as Christian doctrine would have it. Popular Jewish religious culture may have been based principally on external practice, with little regard to inner states of belief, but from the Bible onward, Jewish thought had always taken into account the intent and belief of both the individual and the collective—aspects with which, in late medieval Iberia, Jewish religious thinkers were certainly deeply concerned.

Both Abulafian ecstatic kabbalah and the numerous kabbalistic writings on the meaning and intention of the commandments focused on the inner religious experience of the devotee. Following Maimonides, philosophical treatments of the commandments often considered which commandments conveyed abstract truths, and what sort of mental focus was required in performing them. Even Talmudists derived religious satisfaction not in the rote performance of commandments but in the intellectual experience of analyzing them. Inner experience was an essential component of religiosity for any member of the Jewish intellectual elite. Most likely, Duran shared a common understanding

of religious experience as made up of both internal belief *and* external performance; as a member of the intellectual elite, however, he was naturally drawn to emphasize, and to value, the former. In this respect, his defense of the *conversos* on the grounds of their inner purity was a further step along that path, a step forced on him by the circumstances of his life as a *converso* and the need to justify it.

Which brings us to the particular form taken by that step in *Ma'aseh Efod*. I would tentatively suggest that there is indeed an element of Christian “influence,” but it is the influence that expresses itself through awakening to a challenge and responding to it. It is in Paul’s Epistles that the invidious comparison of the old, Mosaic law of “works” with the new, Christian doctrine of faith is most clearly sketched out. In Paul’s reading all have sinned, and only through divine forbearance and grace, the “propitiation of faith,” can one be saved. The “Old Law” was meant to prepare the Jews for belief in Jesus; after the crucifixion, it was no longer needed. For Paul at his most adversarial, Mosaic law was the letter, which spelled death; Christianity was the living spirit.

It is unlikely that Duran had read Paul before his conversion, but he had to in order to write *Kelimat ha-goyim*. He thereby came into direct contact with these particular charges against Judaism. Traces of the encounter appear at the end of the fifth chapter of *Kelimat ha-goyim*, where Duran considers the question of the Old and New Law. He cites Paul, first where the latter calls the Old Law a “school-master,”³⁵ in reference to the idea that it was intended only to teach and preserve the Jews before the coming of Jesus. Then he alludes to Paul’s description of the Old Law as a law of works (*torat ha-ma’asim*) and the New Law as a law of faith (*torat ha-’emunah*). The source is Romans 3:28–29: “By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”³⁶

Near the end of this discussion, Duran presents a “logical” argument used by some later Christians to show that the Old Law was deficient and would therefore necessarily disappear. The argument, which seems to have originated in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*, is that any law purporting to be divine should be examined and judged rationally in three different respects: first, with respect to its agent, that is, the extent to which it testifies to the existence of God; second, with respect to the content of its commandments; and third, with respect to its final purpose.

In the Christian view, as Duran describes it, the Torah fails in each respect. First, it does not testify to key aspects of divinity, like the Trinity, except in hints and unclear parables. (Here Duran digresses briefly on the nature of alleged Jewish blindness.) Next, the three categories of commandments in the Torah are themselves deficient: (1) ethical commandments, rational commands meant to perfect man's soul like the Ten Commandments, fail because they do not address the heart but only outward behavior, as in the charge not to covet your neighbor's wife, interpreted by Jews (according to these Christians) as merely refraining from adulterous behavior but not from adulterous lust; (2) the legal commandments, given for purposes of civil governance, are deficient in point of unfairness or illogic, as for example in the permission to lend at interest to a foreigner; and (3) the ritual commandments, guides to the proper worship of God, fail because Temple sacrifices did not wipe away all sin, as would occur only with the death of Jesus. This last fact proves the deficiency of the Torah in the third respect as well, namely, its final purpose.³⁷

Duran concludes this chapter by assuring his reader that, although there is more to be said, it suffices to invoke the words of Psalm 19: "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." Then he very briefly pauses to counter the Christian position by interpreting a few verses of the psalm as referring specifically to the enumerated categories. Thus, commandments that testify to the existence of God, like the Sabbath, "make wise the simple." The rational commandments "enlighten the eyes." The legal commandments are "true and righteous altogether." The psalmist, Duran notes, was careful to include all the different parts of the law because "keeping them brings a great reward."³⁸ As for the ritual commandments in particular, Duran responds directly to the charge that sacrifices did not suffice for atonement by quoting verses from Leviticus that explicitly affirm the opposite. He also takes note of commandments that are not rational, which are praised by God in Deuteronomy 4:8.

This less than fully responsive discussion in *Kelimat ha-goyim* should, however, remind us strongly of the introduction to *Ma'aseh Efod*, which, as we just saw, begins with precisely the same verses from Psalm 19 and presents a similar but far more fully elaborated interpretation.³⁹ Here Duran argues explicitly and overtly that the Law of Moses is in reality perfect, and goes to great lengths in contending that it does not in fact privilege deed over intention; if anything, it is rather the other way around.

In sum, Duran already shared medieval (and older) notions of the significance of inner experience in religion. This is made perfectly clear already in his heated criticism—in the 1393 eulogy—of Jews who neglect “intention.” Conversely, his denunciation of Christian materiality in *Al tehi ka-avotekha* makes plain that he also does not credit medieval Iberian Catholicism as a religion of faith or spirit alone. But in encountering the writings of Paul and the scholastic theologians, he faced in particular the claim that the system of Jewish law was imperfect from a *rational* point of view. Some of those alleged flaws concerned issues, like the Trinity, on which Christianity and Judaism definitively parted ways. But the imputation that Jewish law was deficient because of its irrational insistence on works alone clearly touched a nerve.

In *Kelimat ha-goyim*, Duran was fulfilling a narrowly circumscribed purpose and could pause only for the most cursory rebuttal. In *Ma'aseh Efod* he is able to present a picture of Judaism that not only refutes the Pauline claims but does so in a way at once fully continuous with his intellectual formation and deepest Jewish convictions and fully responsive to the needs of the historical moment. Instead of replacing “works” with an amorphous concept of “faith” defined as mere belief in the Jewish God, as he had hinted in the eulogy, he redefines the essence of Judaism itself, retaining its unique amalgam of both “works” and “faith” and confirming its accessibility through, if circumstances allow no other path, the intense contemplation of the letters and the words that make up God’s unbroken promise to his chosen people.

Sigil and Segulah

Magical Elements in Ma'aseh Efod

In *Ma'aseh Efod*, as we shall presently see, Duran draws from Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* while also disclosing an unusual awareness of contemporary magical practices. This combination—of select Maimonidean texts with the medical-magical concept of occult virtue (*segulah*)—makes for a system of religious experience that, while couched in highly conventional philosophical language, also marks a striking departure from the Maimonidean intellectualist tradition. The transmutation was carried out, in my view, under the pressures of Duran's *converso* existence and—to all appearances—in its service. The *conversos*' former relationship with normative Jewish practice has been irrevocably shattered. In response, Duran turns to concepts and techniques that for himself, for his fellow *conversos*, and for the still unconverted remnants of the Jewish community will shape a reconfigured idea of Judaism itself.

In theory, this reshaping of Jewish observance, away from ritual deed and toward inner intention and mental contemplation, might have led to a system even more intellectualist and elitist than the Maimonidean. Aided, as we shall see, by the idea of the *segulah*, Duran creates something far more flexible. In his conception, reading, studying, fully understanding, and remembering the biblical text, or select parts of it, can provide the means of attracting divine emanation and divine providence, and of atoning for transgressions. What is more, the salvific powers of the Bible are not limited to those persons able to apprehend the meaning of the text on the highest intellectual level, be they Talmudists or philosophers or kabbalists. For Duran, the Bible,

available to any minimally educated Jew or *converso*, is a source of salvation even for those who do not or cannot fully understand it, bringing hope and succor to those caught in a desperate and drastically altered historical circumstance.

Duran's reshaping of Judaism as a system of intellectual meditation on divine texts (*sigils*), functioning by means of an occult virtue (*segulah*), bears distinct similarities to Jewish and Christian magical thought of the late-medieval Iberian and southern French world. Here I must stipulate that Duran was not abandoning rationalism. The type of magic he would have found useful was "natural magic," which saw magical effects as a part of the natural world and tended to couch magical practices in rationalist language.

What drove Duran in this direction was not merely the influence of a royal court where magic and other occult sciences were esteemed and where he was engaged as an astrologer. More likely, he was also impelled by the experience of living as one who represented himself to his social world as a Christian but still experienced himself as a Jew in truth. The circumstances that shaped Duran's religious identity thus shaped in turn the particular form of Judaism that, we might assume, he came to practice.

Students of Christian magic have recently turned their attention to the geographical importance of "the Mediterranean coastal region (the Balears, southern France, eastern Spain)."¹ Not surprisingly, this same area is important to the study of late-medieval Jewish magic as well. The earliest texts of Hebrew astral magic have been traced to thirteenth-century Iberia, with translations from mostly Latin sources added by Provençal Jews over the course of the following century.² In the past decades, Jewish contributions to the flowering of late-medieval Christian magic have begun to be documented,³ with some attention paid to the effects of such cross-cultural interchange on the Jewish world itself.⁴

In *Ma'aseh Efod*, as the previous chapter showed, Duran produces an idiosyncratic interpretation of Jewish religious life, one in which the customary ritual practices of Judaism—actualized in the individual Jew's daily observance of the commandments (*mitzvot*)—are rendered subordinate to a related but different activity: namely, the intense study and contemplation of the Hebrew Bible in order to effectuate a direct connection with the divine. This chapter examines the key concept on which Duran relies in this scheme: that of the *segulah* (plural *segulot*), a term characteristic of much medieval medical

thought and also, as we shall see, prominent in the theory underpinning natural (i.e., nondemonic) magic.⁵ After tracing patterns in late medieval Jewish and Christian magic that resonate with Duran's writings in *Ma'aseh Efod* and elsewhere, I will turn to the function of *segulot* first in the medical and then in the magical context. Then I will explore the specific role of the term in Duran's theory of Judaism.

ASTROLOGY, MEDICINE, AND MAGIC

In late medieval Iberia, the linkage of physician and astrologer was commonplace; indeed, astrology was an integral part of much medical practice, and not only in the court of Joan I.⁶ Jewish and Christian doctors regularly incorporated astrological calculations in their work: for instance, choosing or avoiding a particular hour of the day or day of the week or month for delicate procedures like bloodletting or surgery, or assessing the course of an illness or the outcome of a wound according to the position of the moon in its path through the heavens.⁷

An interesting example, albeit of a more marginal method, is recorded in a late fourteenth-century Iberian manuscript belonging to a Jewish physician. It begins with two multilingual lists of medicinal herbs (in Arabic, Latin, and Catalan, all in Hebrew letters) and includes an astrologically attuned chart with Hebrew instructions for figuring out whether or not to draw blood on a particular day: "Calculate how many days will have passed from the new moon to the day on which you want to let blood. Then double them and to the sum add five, and then take in your hand the outcome of the calculation and cast it into fifths in those signs which are in the column across from the month and in the sign where the calculation is complete, find the sign that is in that day. If the sign is hot and moist or hot and dry, according to what you will see after this, let blood, and if it is cold and moist or cold and dry, do not let blood. This is all for healthy patients; we do not consider it for ill patients, who are more complicated."⁸

In general, astrology was not considered a species of magic; in the case of Iberian Jewish physicians in particular, astrological calculation—Maimonides' uncompromising strictures against it notwithstanding—appears to have been fully consonant with their rationalist self-image. And astral magic and astrology are qualitatively different phenomena, as Reimund Leicht has noted, and their

manuscript history, at least in Hebrew, takes an entirely different trajectory. In Leicht's words, "in the manuscript tradition, astral magic [drawing down astral influences for various purposes] had a clear affinity with magic and medicine, whereas judicial astrology [constructing horoscopes and other such types of astrological calculations] always maintained close ties to astronomy."⁹

The distinction Leicht points to in the "manuscript tradition" reflects a distinction in practice. Unlike the astronomical-astrological context, the medical context did not exclude the explicitly magical; on the contrary, the two were closely associated. Medical prescriptions could be highly magical in their wording or their recommended procedures, professional magic was often sought for healing, and doctors themselves sometimes employed magical rituals to supplement their medical practices.¹⁰

One such practice crossing the shadowy line between medicine and magic involved the mobilization of written texts—including sacred texts—for therapeutic purposes. Among Jews, such techniques were associated in particular with the power ascribed to Holy Scripture. The book of Psalms seems to have played a special role here, possibly because psalms were among those scriptural texts most likely to have been memorized.¹¹ *Shimmush Tehillim* ("The Practice of Psalms") was a highly popular Hebrew work (or group of works) devoted to this topic. A typical passage, from a version circulating in late-medieval Iberian lands, is this: "For illnesses of the eyes, recite Psalm 119:49 eighteen times over a mixture of white wine and olive oil and apply it, followed by saying *yihyeh* six times, then 'Uriel Raphael Uraphn-iel Living God King of the World, May it be Your will that the illness be struck from me, that it not be harder for me, in the name of the *One Who stretches out heaven like a tent* (Is. 40:22) Amen, Netzah, Selah."¹² Although most of these charms call for oral recitation of the psalm, some specify writing the verse on a piece of parchment and hanging it around the neck as an amulet. While such incantations and amulets could thus be considered properly "magical"—that is, theurgic rituals performed outside normative liturgical practice—they, too, would presumably have escaped the specific prohibitions of magic and sorcery stipulated by biblical and rabbinic sources.¹³

As an astrologer at the Aragonese court, Profayt Duran/Honoratus de Bonafide could easily have had access to astrological, astral-magic, and magical texts in Latin, a language he knew. Several such texts were circulating in Catalan as well.¹⁴ He was also aware of the

Hebrew *Shimmush Tehillim*; his allusions to it will be discussed at greater length below. And he cites two other magical works, offering in the process one of the earliest attestations we have to each of them in their Hebrew versions. Both fall into the category of astral magic.

The first and most famous of these works of astral magic is the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* or, in its Latin translation, *Picatrix*. The Arabic original is attributed to Maslāma al-Majrīṭī of eleventh-century al-Andalus; it was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century under the auspices of Alfonso X. The work also appears in four different Hebrew versions, two of which are abridgments while the others consist only of fragments.¹⁵ One of the two abridgments, tentatively dated to thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Iberia, is titled *Takhlit he-Ḥakham*, the name by which it was known to Duran.¹⁶

Takhlit he-Ḥakham comprises instructions for making talismans of various sorts: for healing, for separating a man from a woman or vice versa, for ridding oneself of vermin, for inducing royal favor, and so forth. These instructions, taking into account lunar mansions or the configuration of the planets and the constellations, are thoroughly astrological. For example: “Talisman for the bite of scorpions: engrave the form of a scorpion on the body of a bezoar, in the hour of the Moon, when the Moon is in Scorpio, in its second face, and the ascendant is Leo or Taurus or Aquarius, and fix it upon a gold ring, and press it into crushed incense, and give the one who was bitten to drink from it and you will heal him right away.”¹⁷

The second work of astral magic known to Duran, *Sefer ha-Tamar*, is an Arabic divination text written by the otherwise unknown Abu Aflaḥ of Syracuse. It is thought to have been composed in the eleventh or twelfth century and to have been translated into Hebrew in Provence in the second decade of the fourteenth century.¹⁸ Prior to Duran, it is cited by only two fourteenth-century Provençal Jewish rationalists, Qalonymos ben Qalonymos and Nissim of Marseilles.¹⁹ Like *Takhlit he-Ḥakham*, *Sefer ha-Tamar* is extant in very few manuscripts. One of them is included in the same fifteenth-century Italian codex that contains the no less rare *Takhlit he-Ḥakham*.

Duran seems to have read *Sefer ha-Tamar* with one of his students, Meir Crescas; as discussed in Chapter 4, a letter to Meir is devoted to an extended and strikingly philosophical exegesis of a line in the work. As for *Takhlit he-Ḥakham*, Duran mentions it in *Ma'aseh Efod* as a place where one might find the idea, quoted in the name of Aristotle, that each letter of the alphabet—and the sound made by it—is

influenced by a particular planet, and that is the reason why enunciated words and names can “achieve a wondrous impression on existent things.”²⁰ This remark, stripped of its specifically astrological associations, is rich with implications for Duran’s theological ruminations on the language of the Hebrew Bible elsewhere in *Ma’aseh Efod*.

Another significant locus of magical activity in the later Middle Ages centered less on physical healing or on divination than on what might be called spiritual therapy. New research into previously understudied manuscripts has revealed evidence of increasing curiosity about methods of attaining intellectual perfection and divine illumination.²¹ One important technique, for which evidence exists in amulets and talismans as well as in books and their flyleaves, is meditation on a text or a text-based diagram (a *sigil*).²² A number of Latin works deal with these issues, in many cases drawing on Hebrew and Arabic sources and in turn being themselves translated into Hebrew. Such Hebrew translations have been traced to Christian Iberia and Provence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggesting once again certain commonalities of interest between Jews and Christians in the Mediterranean coastal region.

A possible Jewish source of these Christian meditational techniques may lie in the writings of the thirteenth-century ecstatic kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1239–c. 1291). The Abulafian strain of Iberian kabbalah—which extended into Italy and has been intensively studied by Moshe Idel—is highly philosophical, generally free of attachment to the *Zohar*, and heavily dosed with magic.²³ Abulafia developed a system of meditation on divine names and mental permutations of the letters of those names as a method of gaining access to the divine realm and in particular to the agent intellect, the source of prophecy. It is thought that Abulafia took his system from the Sufi technique of *dhikr*; his own term for the method, *hazkarah*, is close to a transliteration of the Arabic.²⁴

Meditational techniques of this kind appear in a number of Latin magical texts, including the *Liber iuratus Honorii*²⁵ and the diverse versions of the *Ars notoria*.²⁶ They aim at attaining visionary experiences, at drawing down knowledge from heaven, using *sigils* (inscribed symbols, in these cases often magical diagrams) for meditational rituals, and also, in the case of the *Ars notoria*, at acquiring secular knowledge and improvement of the intellect.²⁷ While avoiding reference to demons, the texts specify ritual preparations such as burning incense, fasting, and meditation, and in particular reciting prayers

and invocations to angels and to God. Like other medieval magical works, these texts appeal not infrequently to a supposed tradition of Jewish magic, and are often associated with the figure of King Solomon. It has even been suggested that the *Liber iuratus Honorii* draws specifically on the kabbalah of Abulafia.²⁸ Indeed, part of that work originated in Iberia, and one of its two textual traditions passed by means of lengthy extracts into a compendium of magic, *Summa sacre magice*, by a mid-fourteenth-century Catalan or Valencian Christian, Berengario Ganell.²⁹ Ganell sold a copy of the book near Perpignan in the mid-fourteenth century (at some point between 1324 and 1344); another copy appeared in Aragon shortly afterward (between 1357 and 1375).³⁰

Condemned by Christian clerics like Albertus Magnus, the *Ars notoria* survives in something like fifty extant manuscripts.³¹ In this kind of ritual, the individual would first prepare by lengthy fasting and praying and then gaze at *sigils* called in this tradition *notae*—diagrams incorporating prayers and angelic names—and recite prayers involving a series of those names. The ritual, thought to have emerged from memory techniques, is meant to impress the diagrams on the imagination and in particular on the memory in order to increase their power—all such activities being aimed at drawing down the divine efflux. A Hebrew version of the *Ars notoria* appears in three Italian manuscripts under the title *Melekheth ha-muskelet*, in a translation dated tentatively to Provence at the end of the fourteenth century.³² Like some Latin versions, the Hebrew version omits the *notae*.

Ramon Llull's *Ars brevis*, completed in 1308, is another text involving a mix of visual and textual magic; indeed, the T figure in Llull's work bears a strong similarity to the *sigil* that plays a central role in the magical rituals of *Liber iuratus Honorii*.³³ The *Ars brevis* was translated into Hebrew in the late fifteenth century for the use of a circle of Jews who sought mystical conjunction and who, as Harvey J. Hames has demonstrated, understood Llull to be doing something similar to the letter permutations of Abraham Abulafia.³⁴

OCCULT VIRTUE (SEGULAH)

What all these meditational techniques have in common with the more practically oriented activity of medical healing discussed earlier is their association with written texts—and, among Jews, with

Scripture. And this brings us in turn to Profayt Duran's key concept in *Ma'aseh Efod*: namely, the *segulah*. In the Hebrew Bible, the word *segulah* indicates something highly precious and uniquely treasured. Thus, Israel is auspiciously referred to as God's "treasured people," *'am segulah* (Deut. 7:6), in a pairing that would infuse the word *segulah* with a sanctified resonance ever after. By Duran's time, the term had also acquired a variety of more particularized meanings, depending on the context in which it was invoked.

In the glossary at the back of Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew edition of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, we find the plain, "philosophical" meaning of *segulah*: namely, "a characteristic quality of a substance which is not part of its definition." A familiar illustration is laughter in man: while man is the only creature who laughs, the ability to laugh is not part of the definition of "man."

Then there is the medical context, in which *segulah* takes on a quite specific meaning, indicating a faculty or power belonging to a drug, stone, or plant that cannot be explained by the rational principles of Greco-Arabic medicine. The corresponding Arabic term, *khāssah*, plural *khawāss*, appears in Avicenna's writings—for example, the *Canon of Medicine*—as deriving from "whole substance" or "specific form."³⁵ Those rational principles stipulate, first, that the action of a drug or medicament is a direct result of the relative balance (in Latin, *complexio*; in Hebrew, *mezeg*) of the four qualities (hot, cold, moist, dry) in a substance and, second, that opposites cure opposites (i.e., a "hot" drug should cure an illness resulting from an excess of "cold" in the body).

But in practice, herbs or medicines do not always work according to theory. That is to say, a mixture of the qualities of hot and cold, wet and dry does not suffice to explain some of the perceptible effects of a medicament containing those qualities. This would be the case with, say, the laxative effects of scammony. To explain them, one must assume a specific quality or form that inheres in scammony; that is itself a result of the mixture of qualities in scammony; and that works as the form of the whole of the substance of scammony, thereby producing the medical "virtue"—the power or faculty—of causing diarrhea when ingested.

In his treatise on poisons, Maimonides alludes to the same concept in the case of a compound medicine, *theriac*, which—against all theoretical principles—is said to cure any illness, and also in the case of the power of chicken brains or lemon peel to combat poisoning.³⁶

Maimonides himself carves out a separate category for seemingly irrational magical practices in medicine that “derive from experience,” by invoking precisely those occult virtues that would later become so important. In the *Guide* III.37, he asserts that “it is allowed to use all remedies . . . that experience has shown to be valid even if reasoning does not require them. For they pertain to medicine, and their efficacy may be ranged together with the purgative action of scammony.”³⁷

One important collection of medical recipes is a tenth-century Arabic work translated into Hebrew in two versions, once as *Sefer ha-Segulot* (“The Book of *Segulot*”) and again as *Sefer ha-Nisyonot* (“The Book of Experiences”), attributed to the twelfth-century Andalusian poet, astrologer, and biblical commentator Abraham ibn Ezra. The author of *Sefer ha-Nisyonot* explains that the medical effects of, for example, poultices or amulets are all owing to a *segulah* that works “by the whole of its own substance,” and that these effects can be observed even though we cannot understand or predict how they have come about.³⁸

By the fourteenth century, the concept of the *segulah* was well established in the medical literature, both Jewish and Christian.³⁹ In Latin it came to be translated as *proprium* or *proprietas*, with the meaning of “particular or intrinsic property” or “specific form.” In the fourteenth-century Hebrew translation of the *Medicationes parabole* of Arnald de Villanova, the term *proprietas* is rendered by the Hebrew word *segulah*, thus: “*Medicina potens a proprietate conferre, melior est conferente virtute complexionis.*” הרפואה המועילה בסגולה = “יותר טובה מהרפואה המועילה באיכות.” Meaning: the medicine that heals by means of a *segulah* is superior to one that heals by a (mere) quality.⁴⁰

Segulah can indeed be translated as “virtue” or “property,” or sometimes “remedy.” But perhaps the more accurate English translation is “occult virtue,” in the sense of a power whose mechanism is unknown or unknowable. Nathan ben Joel Falaquera’s late thirteenth-century medical compendium, *Tzori ha-Guf*, asserts that a *segulah* derives from the interaction among the various elements and qualities in a substance: “It has been explained that it is impossible for one to determine the *segulot* of substances by means of logic, unless it were that every measure of the elements were known in each and every existent, and we knew the action which followed from each and every connection created among the existents according to those measures of the elements.”⁴¹ For Falaquera, the complexity of the calculation precludes our knowing what the effect of a particular herb will be.

In brief, in the highly rationalized context of learned medicine, the *segulah* was employed as an explanatory device to clear room for the incorporation of seemingly irrational but widely accepted elements of medical practice into an overarching rationalist theory.

But learned and rationalist medicine was not the only context in which the term was employed. Tellingly, *segulah* in the sense of occult virtue appears in the realm of magic as well—Jewish and non-Jewish alike. By way of Avicenna and the medical context, as Nicolas Weill-Parot has written, the concept comes to infuse Latin magical thought well before the end of the fourteenth century. And just as in medicine, so in magic, the key point is that the power of the virtue derives not from the action of demons but from astral and therefore natural forces, thereby providing a “rational” explanation for seemingly irrational physical effects.⁴²

Commonly adduced to describe the otherwise inexplicable healing powers of precious stones or particular plants or animal parts, occult virtues could also explain the magical effects of words, especially divine words. In a late fifteenth-century Catalan manual for quasi-astrological prognostication, we find the following statement: “Although nature has dealt out and deals out misfortune . . . , it also provides the manner and the medicine to avoid such misfortune. This wisdom can be found in infinite ways, most commonly in precious stones and herbs; and even in animals; in seals or in stones inscribed with images. . . . And even better are the Psalms and the holy words in which our Lord has placed *virtue*” (emphasis added).⁴³

So powerful and multivalent was the concept of the *segulah* that we should not be surprised to see its entry into late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Jewish theology, as documented recently by Dov Schwartz. There too it is adduced as a way of rationalizing the assumed beneficial effects of ritual observance. The commandments, in this theory, behave like medications possessing occult virtues: particular properties that, when the commandments are performed, will benefit both the body and the soul.⁴⁴

As it happens, Duran was aware of theories applying the doctrine of the occult virtue to the commandments; but he rejects those theories. In the opening section of *Ma'aseh Efod*, as noted in the previous chapter, the main theme is “keeping the Torah,” an activity or state of being that brings both eternal life and bliss for the soul and, in the here and now, corporeal success and physical safety. To review the context: keeping the Torah is what God requires of Jews and

constitutes the ultimate purpose of Judaism. What, then, Duran asks, is this “keeping,” exactly? Does it mean performing the commandments? Not in and of itself; to Duran, performing a commandment without the proper mind-set is utterly without benefit or purpose. Instead, the actions commanded by the Torah are “deeds of the intellect and of thought.”⁴⁵ “Keeping the Torah” or, as he reads it, acquiring the “wisdom of the Torah,” is an intellectual activity.

And what is the “wisdom” that is desirable? Let us briefly recall Duran’s description of the three schools of thought on this matter. According to the Talmudists, wisdom is the Babylonian Talmud; according to the philosophers, it is Aristotelian philosophy; and according to the kabbalists, it is the kabbalistic tradition handed down orally for centuries. Duran, as we saw, explicitly discards all three—and yet, elements of each, subtly altered and adjusted, clearly play a role in his own judgment: namely, that “constant occupation with [the Torah], and keeping it in the heart and the contemplation of it and keeping its presence in the memory and not turning one’s thoughts from it toward any other thing during the time one is occupied with it, all this directs a man straight to the ultimate eternal felicity and brings him to it.”⁴⁶

On this point, Duran waxes almost lyrical, stressing again and again that intense mental concentration on the Hebrew Bible, retaining its presence in one’s memory, and keeping it in the heart draw down the divine intellectual efflux or emanation (the *shefa*’), thereby attaining for the individual a certain earthly felicity and even, for the worthiest, intellectual perfection and immortality of the soul:

For just as the sanctuary was a cause for the divine presence [*shek-hinah*] always being among the children of Israel as it says, “*And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them*” (Ex. 25:8), and it says “*And I set my tabernacle among you: . . . And I will walk among you*” (Lev. 26:11–12), so too is this sanctified book—because of which divine providence was with the people when they read it often with a pleasing intention and investigation into the inner [meanings] of its passages; and it is a cause of [the people’s] maintenance and perpetuation and felicity. Regarding this, it has been testified that everyone who seeks the Lord, by being engaged in this book, “*shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in its season*” (Ps. 1:3). And about this Solomon said in his wisdom, “*My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments*” (Prov. 3:1). He [Solomon] admonishes constant remembering and keeping the Torah of the Lord in the heart. And this is the entire Torah of the

Lord—as he promised also, “*For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee*” (Prov. 3:2). And everything in this pericope and many [biblical] writings admonish engagement in the Torah and keeping it and remembering it in the heart, and so do passages by the sages as well. And just as the Temple with those great services performed in it were a cause of the Lord’s granting atonement for the sins of the people in transgressing His commandments, may He be blessed, so occupation with this sanctified book with a pleasing intention and remembering it and keeping it in the heart is a reason for the Lord to forgive the sins of the people and their errors. And as it is testified, “*But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts*” (Jer. 31:33) and it says “*for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*” (Jer. 31:34).⁴⁷

In passages like these, one is put in mind of Abulafia’s *hazkarah* and his stress on the use of the divine name(s) as a meditational technique for eliciting illumination. Might we regard Duran’s almost obsessive repetition of the importance of *zikhronah* (remembering) and *shemirah ba-lev* (keeping or retaining in the heart) as a stand-in for that Abulafian technique, now transferred from mental retrieval and oral recitation of divine names to a similar type of concentration on scriptural text? After all, as Duran notes more than once, with a nod to Jewish mystical tradition, the entire Torah is said to be made up of the names of God. The text itself becomes a kind of *sigil*.⁴⁸

It is in the service of explaining how all this works that Duran invokes the *segulah*. By means of “the *segulah* that inheres in this divine Torah,” he writes, it can come about that “if one meditates on the Torah constantly . . . and fulfills deeds from it . . . one’s ways will prosper, [that is,] one’s felicity in this world . . . and the achievement of eternal felicity that is entirely intellectual.”⁴⁹ Moreover, thanks to this same virtue, one can achieve the desired end solely by reading the text, although the reward is all the greater “if there is along with this a good understanding of what is meant by [the text] and an apprehension of its depths and secrets.” In this connection, Duran goes beyond reading and meditation to cite the use of psalms for magic and healing à la *Shimmush Tehillim*, a practice that he does not hesitate to lump together with ritually normative activities like reciting *pesuqei de-zimra* (psalms recited before morning prayers), wearing *tefillin*, or affixing a *mezuzah*; all, from his discussion, would seem to work with equal legitimacy as protective charms.

This same mix of the normative and the extranormative can be seen in passages on the specific place of prayer in Duran's scheme—another context in which sanctioned devotional practices are explicated in terms that evoke quasi-magical associations. Prayer, namely the beseeching of God “to direct one's path to the knowledge of his Torah,” is the last of the fifteen mnemonic aids presented in *Ma'aseh Efod* to enable one to engage in Torah. For Duran, one should not pray for things dependent on free will, such as the *desire* to engage in Torah, but only for the prerequisites of such study: corporeal needs like food and health as well as “depth of thought and sharpness of the intellectual faculty and argumentation and acuteness . . . and improvement of the faculty of memory and of retention.” These, he stipulates, “are the gift of God,” and since “not everyone merits them, . . . it is proper and obligatory to pray for them to Him, blessed be He.” Indeed, Duran concludes, this is exactly what “David prayed for in Psalm 119.”⁵⁰

In the version of *Shimmush Tehillim* circulating in Iberian lands, parts of Psalm 119, as noted earlier, are imbued with beneficial powers remarkably congruent with those invoked by Duran. For example, reciting the first eight verses of this psalm can induce God to grant one the ability to perform a commandment; recitation of the ninth three times a day will remove forgetfulness from the heart; writing down the thirty-third verse on a leaf and drinking the letters dissolved in honey will cause an “opening of the heart”; the fifty-seventh will help one study Torah and retain it within; the seventy-seventh aids in particular “the ability to engage in Torah”; the verse following, if repeated three times, will prevent the nullification of one's Torah study. And so forth.⁵¹ Whether or not Duran deliberately means to prescribe such incantatory actions, his stress on the efficacy of prayer in providing or enhancing intellectual apprehension is a hallmark of magical practices popular in late medieval Christian (and Jewish) circles.

And here it may be appropriate to note still another context—in this case, outside the frame of *Ma'aseh Efod*—in which Duran makes use of the term *segulah*: the context of Christian devotional practice and in particular the ritual of transubstantiation of the host. He deals with this mystery of the church in each of his two polemical works, *Kelimat ha-Goyim* and *Al tehi ka-avotekha*. In the former, he offers a fairly straightforward explication of the ritual: “This [body of Jesus] indeed exists in the bread and the wine after these phrases are said by the priest designated for this service, whether [the priest] be great or small, wise or foolish, pious or wicked, for the one who fills the place

of Jesus, namely, the Pope, has the power to give to each priest this power, for [there is] a *segulah* which inheres in these phrases to bring down the body of this messiah. . . . And this root they call Eucharist, which means good grace [*hen tov*], for by means of this service they obtain also eternal life according to their faith when eating the bread of God in holiness and in purity of heart and in perfect belief, and similarly with the wine.”⁵² The same scene appears in *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, where Duran’s comments, however, are cast in an unmistakably mocking tone: “For the body of the messiah . . . descends . . . and comes to the altar . . . upon the completion of that chosen utterance which comes from the mouth of the priest, not the High [Priest] but any priest whatsoever, great and small alike, wise and foolish alike, righteous and wicked alike, pious and sinner alike, because of the *segulah* inherent in that utterance which was handed down from the mouth of the messiah after he ate and after he drank with his prophets and his sages, his disciples and his apostles.”⁵³

In both places Duran, on the authority of Christian theologians, ascribes an occult virtue to the utterance—*Hoc est enim corpus meum. Hic est enim calyx sanguinis mei* (“This is my body. This is the cup of my blood”)—that marks the moment of transubstantiation. It is curious that he should have resorted to this term in at once characterizing a ritual that he clearly regards as irrational, an instance of magic pure and simple, and in defining a key component of his own theological system. But for him, clearly, its use in the Christian context does not vitiate—in fact, it rather tends to support—his discussion of the *segulah* in the context of the Hebrew Bible. By invoking the same rational concept, one common to both Jewish and Christian intellectual cultures, and by drawing a parallel (and, to be sure, a contrast) between the workings of the theological systems, he bolsters his case. In the miracle of transubstantiation, as Duran reports, it is the words of Jesus that are thought to possess this particular virtue and power; but of course, Christians believe in the divinity of the speaker. How much stronger, then, is the case for the power of the *segulah* in the context of the Hebrew Bible, whose words derive from the true and uncontestedly divine source.

This is hardly the only curious thing about the *mélange* of associations aroused by the term *segulah* in Duran’s work, or about the purposes

to which it is put—all of which serve starkly to underline the inescapable tensions informing his effort to construct a coherent Jewish theology for his time and place. For running right alongside his co-opting of a term from the realm of (rationalized) empirical medicine and (rationalized) ritual magic in *Ma'aseh Efod* is the work's prominent Maimonidean element, reminding us again of Duran's authority as a commentator on the *Guide* and of his abiding sense of himself as, still, a legatee of Iberian Jewish rationalism.

In *Guide* III.51, Maimonides describes a progressive training in contemplation through concentration during liturgical practice, beginning with the text of the *shema'*. This method of intense contemplation, for Maimonides, ultimately leads, in one worthy of it, to the capability of remaining intellectually tied to the divine while living one's daily life. The passage appears in the *Guide* directly after a reference to prophecy. Fittingly, Duran quotes and uses the passage to support his own conclusion that reading and contemplating just the words of the Hebrew Bible not only brings with it certain this-worldly benefits⁵⁴ but suffices to elicit the same divine emanation that both constitutes the prophetic experience and guards the prophet from physical harm when in this exalted state.⁵⁵ "Except that I say that also engagement and meditation and reading them alone is some part of [true] worship and among those things that help bring the divine emanation and providence with the *segulah* that inheres in them, since this also is from the will of God."⁵⁶

In a significant study of Duran's grammar, Josef Stern argues convincingly that what Duran is presenting for his reader is not the Hebrew Bible alone, *qua* amulet, but rather the system of the Hebrew language: both the rules of grammar (the subject of *Ma'aseh Efod*) and their expression in the words and phrases of the Hebrew Bible. By coming to know the principles of Hebrew grammar, by using this knowledge to understand the words of the Bible, and by holding those words in the mind, one encounters the language God spoke to create the world. And since the structure of the Hebrew language reflects created reality (as noted at the end of Chapter 6), by mastering Hebrew and its expression in the Hebrew Bible, Stern argues, one can also understand the structure of God's created world.⁵⁷ Hebrew grammar is thus a key to divine knowledge. It is, presumably, this "good understanding" of the Hebrew text that fully actualizes the *segulah* that inheres in Scripture.

According to the Maimonidean tradition, divine providence (and indeed prophecy) falls on a person who is not only pious but (more

important) intellectually perfect. In Duran's reinterpretation, therefore, the divine overflow is a response not just to the intellectual perfection of the individual but also to the *segulah* or occult virtue inherent in the words of Scripture themselves. For those whose intellectual abilities are indeed highly developed, his stipulated goal is memorization, understanding, and constant contemplation of the Hebrew Bible, ideally through the fundamental rules of its grammar, taught in *Ma'aseh Efod*; for those at lower levels, meditation on the words of the Hebrew Bible without a full understanding of their meaning, or even just possessing and gazing at a codex of it, will achieve some level of immortality for the soul and some level of divine protection in this world.

Duran thus offers a form of religious experience based on Maimonides' stark intellectualism, but one that clears some room—as Maimonides does not—for those whose mental and spiritual abilities have been constrained for any reason. In making this move, he relies heavily on the medical associations of the *segulah* concept. Before attributing occult powers to the scriptural text, he rejects the idea that the commandments are beneficial in and of themselves when performed without intention. Those who defend this false idea, he notes, tend to draw a misplaced analogy with medicine, which works without regard to the mental state either of the doctor or of the patient. Later he articulates what he regards as a truer analogy. Like composite medicines (he writes), the precise order and form of the biblical text are essential to its power. Just as physicians are careful to preserve the exact mixture of ingredients in ancient recipes so as not to alter their composite form and the virtue that results from it, so the early sages paid strict attention to the grammar and punctuation of the biblical text, specifically in order not to disturb its occult virtues.⁵⁸ And to continue the metaphor, he later asserts that just as medicines exert their effects through different modes of action (consuming medication by eating or drinking it, coming into physical contact with it, or inhaling it, for example), so too the holy book has multifarious modes of action, such as looking at it, for example, or reading and contemplating it.⁵⁹ Duran co-opts the medical analogy, replacing the commandments with the text of the Torah itself.

Duran is quite aware of the problematic nature of the occult virtue and of the slipperiness of the terrain he is traversing. As discussed in Chapter 9, early on in *Kelimat ha-Goyim*, he concludes that the “miracles” performed by Jesus were not done through the permitted

medium of “practical kabbalah,” but were likely to have been the result of forbidden Egyptian magic. In the eighth chapter of that book, he refers back to the same idea in a tentative interpretation of a verse from the Gospels, “what will be bound on earth will be bound in heaven” (Matt. 18:18): “Perhaps [Jesus’] intention [in saying this] was with regard to that which he taught [his disciples] of that craft [*melakhah*] by which he would do some of those matters that are outside rational logic [*hutz mi-ha-beqesh ha-sikbli*]⁶⁰—whatever that craft was—and he said that whatever they wanted they could do by means of this craft.”⁶⁰ Duran’s characterization of forbidden magic thus specifically excludes it from the category of a science. It is first of all a “craft,” which means that it is restricted to instructions for practice and not informed by the theoretical principles and explanations of those practices. It is also “outside rational logic.” In other words, it is not accessible to human reason.

On that very account, perhaps, the Iberian rationalist in him must make the point that the action of the *segulah* is not *by nature* unknowable to the human mind. In exploiting a term freighted with echoes of philosophy, medicine, and magic, he reverts to a quasi-scientific rationale for his devotional program. Invoking an imaginary opponent who might say that his opinion does not conform to reality or, scornfully, that it is only “something good for the faithful, who live by their faith and do not seek a proof for it,” he answers as follows: “I say that the powers of existent things, and their *segulot*, are not attained by analogy [logic] and reasoning, and there is nothing in them that the intellect decrees. Indeed, all that we know about them is by experience and sense perception. And yet it is possible that they have a cause, since they are things that follow the rule of the form, which we cannot [itself] comprehend since the philosophers are not able, with all of their investigations, to obtain the form of the smallest of plants or any of the other existent things.”⁶¹

So useful when applied to the world of medical substances and their physical effects, the concept of the occult virtue is drafted here to explain another avowedly empirical manifestation: the effects of the divine Word. Within a normatively philosophical or Maimonidean framework, the idea of the inherent power of the Hebrew Bible may not be fully explicable, or indeed explicable at all. Within the context of scholastic medicine and its relatively unobjectionable quasi-magical practices—and justified by the concept of occult virtue—the urgent need for such an idea is framed by Duran in a vocabulary

sanctioned by Jewish tradition and cross-cultural usage alike, even while sheltering, however uneasily, under the legitimating wing of Iberian Jewish rationalism.

CONCLUSIONS

In *Ma'aseh Efod*, Duran's rationalism encompasses influences drawn from a wider range of writing than just Maimonides. In this work and in the religious vision he presents in its introduction, Duran takes his Maimonidean language, his Maimonidean system, and his Maimonidean ideals and manipulates them in ways that go beyond the master's intentions. He both expands the means of salvation and extends their benefits to the unintelligent and even to the *converso*. This is not to say that he has abandoned his deep-seated rationalism. Like late medieval Iberian Jewish intellectual culture itself, "rationalism" has rather been broadened to include elements that would have appalled Maimonides, practices associated with even the most rationalized magic being a primary example.

But the magic that appeals to Duran, like the kabbalah he is on occasion open to, was not or was no longer "irrational." By this time, what we would call magic, as well as astrology, was a part of medical practice and not necessarily seen as opposed to medical rationalism. This too might be said of certain strains of Iberian kabbalah which superimposed Maimonidean terms onto kabbalistic thought (as in the case of Joseph Gikatilla and especially those kabbalists like Abraham Abulafia who eschewed the system of *sefirot*).

Duran's idea of memorization and contemplation of the text of the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation, as noted, is closely aligned with the passage in *Guide* III.51 where Maimonides describes a progressive training in contemplation. For Maimonides, what leads ultimately to the ability to remain intellectually tied to the divine, even while living one's daily existence, proceeds by way of intense concentration during liturgical practice, beginning with the text of the *shema'*—a prayer that is made up of a succession of biblical passages and phrases. Here, in other words, is Maimonides at his most transcendent, limning a kind of mystical rationalism that in Duran's hands becomes elaborated into an ideal.

It is similarly in *Guide* III.51 that Maimonides famously describes a kind of providence that protects the individual from earthly evils while he is experiencing divine intellectual emanation. The passage,

which baffled Maimonides' radically rationalist interpreter and translator Samuel ibn Tibbon,⁶² suits Duran's vision perfectly, grounding his repeated emphasis on the ability of providence to protect not just the individual Jew but Jewish communities as a whole. In short, Duran's Maimonides is the Maimonides of the inner life, of contemplation of the divine in the midst of a wildly distracting worldly existence.

Drawing directly from the authority of the *Guide*, Duran's idea that the truest form of Judaism consists in memorizing and contemplating the Hebrew Bible by means of its grammatical rules also answers to the necessities of *converso* existence. His conception of the proper focus of a Jewish life places all the emphasis on the individual's internal state of mind. Outer behavior is secondary in importance, a demotion that, in circumstances where observance of the commandments is severely restricted, takes on highly charged significance by holding out the possibility of redemption through the reorientation of spiritual life.

One might suggest that it was the pressures of his own converted life that drove Duran to forge out of his rationalist culture—as it was, with all its complexities, intricacies, and noncanonical elements—a more inclusive vision of Judaism, one that stretched the seams of Maimonideanism to but not past the breaking point. A *converso* could well know Hebrew and read the Hebrew Bible, and to the best of his ability could contemplate the grammatical rules and inner meanings of the text, including the commandments prescribed in it. What he could not safely do was to center his spiritual life on the actual observance of those commandments. Duran offers a system tailored to these circumstances, a system through which redemption can be attained by individuals with a range of intellectual powers and education. At the upper, elite end, the curriculum involves intensive contemplation of the text and its linguistics; at the lower end, anyone capable of memorizing Scripture—the Psalms, for example—can safely rely on the talismanic potency of the holy words. Indeed, just owning a Hebrew Bible can confer both spiritual and material benefit.

In the service of his bibliocentric scheme, Duran appropriates the idea of the occult virtue (*segulah*) that philosophers and physicians locate in magnets and medicines and that kabbalists locate in the commandments, and transplants this same power from the commandments to Scripture itself. And he goes farther. The language-based mysticism and the techniques of reading and recitation developed by

Abraham Abulafia and other kabbalists are conceived as an extension of Jewish ritual practice; they have been rightly described as hyper-nomian.⁶³ Duran, by identifying “Torah” with the literal words of Scripture, moves the emphasis from observance to contemplation. His obsessive concentration on the words of Scripture is not a step beyond normative Jewish practice but a step sideways to it, shifting the focus from praxis to word, or to the Word. As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, responding to the Christian argument that Judaism is a religion of works and not of faith, Duran interprets Judaism as, if anything, a religion of faith, but where the “faith” he ultimately offers is intellectual meditation on the divine Word, in this case the divinely spoken Hebrew Bible.

Ma’aseh Efod does not come out of nowhere. In his 1393 eulogy for Abraham ha-Levi of Girona, Duran had already argued for an accommodation of the *conversos*’ lack of observance. There he managed to find, and to articulate, a justification for his situation, and to embed it within the terms of the religious philosophy that he had spent the previous decades studying and propounding. In that document, Duran asserts that although the outward deeds of his fellow forced converts might be characterized as idolatrous, their hearts are pure—and they therefore merit redemption along with the rest of the Jewish people. Not only does he explicitly defend them and himself on the grounds of this inner purity, he raises the principle of inner “intention” (*kavvanah*) above that of observance as *the* test of Jewish identity. Turning the tables on those nominal Jews whose actions are performed without proper intention, he goes so far as to hold *them* at least partly accountable for the present travails of their people. In this respect, a *converso* driven by inner intention might occupy a higher level than one who has remained a Jew in name only.

If, in the eulogy, Duran’s defensive protestations can seem anguished or despairing, in *Ma’aseh Efod*, after he has spent a decade living as a Christian, all such traces have disappeared. Remaining faithful to his intellectual and cultural legacy, he has constructed a way of living as a *converso* that not only shelters the inner individual from detection by hostile authority but enables him to be thoroughly Jewish, following the true purpose of God and his Torah.

And the message he conveys to his fellow *conversos* is a message as well for the damaged Jewish community that still endured. In constructing his overall scheme, Duran refashions contemporary philosophical and kabbalistic thought into a usable system of education

and religious experience. His hierarchy in *Ma'aseh Efod* encompasses the study of philosophy, medicine, and metaphysics, each in its proper place and time, but sets the Bible on the highest educational rung. Indeed, his manifest intent in this late work is to incorporate all religious *and* nonreligious study into one principal spiritual-intellectual curriculum, which he terms “occupation with the Torah.” This, in the end, is the key to group survival.

But of course it is for the *conversos* and their specific spiritual dilemma that Duran’s conception is especially apt. In the post-1391 world, in which a community of forced converts was trying to make sense of its strange new existence, questions of salvation and religious observance, of intention and deed, had assumed exceptional significance. To these, Duran addresses himself directly, reassuring his fellow *conversos* that a religious Jewish life can be achieved even in the absence of outward observance. For there is one crucial act of religious service—the study of the Hebrew Bible with the proper intention—to which the *converso* does still have as much access as any Jew, and through the performance of which even a *converso* can call down the divine efflux. This act can provide the means of attracting God’s providence, of atoning for their transgressions, and of saving their souls. It can even be instrumental in bringing about the final and passionately longed for redemption.

Which raises a question: is there any evidence that *conversos* understood or accepted this message, or responded to it in any way?

An examination of the extant manuscripts listed in the IMHM database does reveal that *Ma'aseh Efod* was popular among Iberian and Italian Jews (and Iberian immigrants to Italy) in the century before the final expulsion. It exists in no fewer than thirty-seven manuscripts just from the fifteenth century; of those, eight were copied in an Italian hand and a full twenty-five in a Sephardic hand. This is in curious contrast to Duran’s commentary on Maimonides’ *Guide*—for which he is perhaps best known today but which is extant in a mere nine manuscripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Italian Jews of the fifteenth century and later clearly appreciated certain aspects of Duran’s thought in general, although not necessarily *Ma'aseh Efod* or its specific relevance to *conversos*. We see affinities with Duran’s quasi-magical ideas in the language-oriented kabbalistic synthesis of Yohanan Alemanno,⁶⁴ commonalities between his scientific work and the astronomical and mathematical

interests of Mordechai Finzi,⁶⁵ and the influence of his mnemonics on the seventeenth-century Leone Modena.⁶⁶

Among Iberian Jews, however, while *Ma'aseh Efod* was evidently well circulated, the grounds of their interest are not at all obvious. The bulk of the work consists of a logical presentation of the rules and structure of Hebrew grammar, and there was indeed burgeoning interest in such studies among fifteenth-century Jews.⁶⁷ Nor was Duran alone in seeking to advance fresh arguments for the linguistic preeminence of the Hebrew Bible; among other such implicitly polemical enterprises, as Ram Ben-Shalom has pointed out, Isaac Nathan of Arles in the mid-fifteenth century composed the first Hebrew concordance of the Bible.⁶⁸

Were Jews (and not just *conversos*) attracted, then, by Duran's brief for the (relatively accessible) Hebrew Bible as a sufficient guarantor of Jewish merit, unbound from the requirements of expertise in Talmud, an extensive philosophical education, or immersion in the intricacies of kabbalistic lore? Did *conversos*, in particular, find direction and sustenance in his reassuring message that a Jewish life so constructed would succeed in adequately defining God's relation to them? Or was Duran's conception of a bibliocentric religious life too alien to traditional ideas of what Judaism meant and entailed?

Unfortunately, there is no way of responding to any of these highly tantalizing questions.

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Conclusion

Over the course of this book, basing my discussion on a number of disparate extant sources, I have sought to evoke the voice and the spirit of Profayt Duran, a late medieval Jew who after his forced baptism was known publicly as Honoratus de Bonafide and privately as the Efod. What has emerged is a portrait of a rationalist Jewish intellectual whose broad-ranging philosophical and scientific education was ultimately mustered in defense of deeply grounded religious convictions.

Like others of his generation in Iberia, Duran was compelled during the riots of 1391 to become a Christian in name. Afterward, using all the intellectual resources available to him, he was still able in secret not only to retaliate in writing against the religion he was forced to profess but also to compose treatises meant to strengthen the Jewish community that remained. In his last work, Duran drew on his eclectic knowledge of philosophy, medicine, and magical texts to modify his Maimonidean Judaism into a form of Jewish religiosity that could be redemptive for himself, and, in theory, for other *conversos*.

Historians of medieval science have regularly attended to their subject's historical and cultural contexts. More specifically, some have focused on the ways in which local cultures and social norms shaped scientific activity in the early modern period and, in turn, on the role played by typologies of scientific pursuit in the formation of local

identity.¹ All this is relevant to my own inquiry in this book. Duran and his friends, forging bonds through their mutual interest in Jewish philosophy and science, exchanging learned epistles and participating in small study groups, sustained a coherent identity despite their tiny numbers and geographic dispersion. The manuscript traces of their scientific activity (study, teaching, literary correspondence) have allowed for a partial analysis of this context and how it operated.

In the case of medieval Iberian and Provençal Jews, moreover, a considerable literature has centered on which sciences they chose to pursue and how they perceived the aim of scientific activity.² For example, the generally accepted medieval understanding that to grasp the workings of God's cosmos was a means—in Maimonidean terms—of coming to love and fear God helped provide a large lay readership for works of qualitative cosmology.³ In this book I have also attempted to tease out particular elements of the scientific worldview as they seem to have affected Duran and his circle. Some of the issues tackled in Duran's research agenda are indeed attributable to statements made by Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Going beyond that, Duran and his circle were also engaged in technical mathematical astronomy, an activity I trace to his contact with the philosophy and astronomy of Gersonides.

Scientific activity not only was valued for its own sake, or as a means of personal advancement, but could also play a vital role in the formation of a specifically Jewish identity, Duran's emphatically included. Abraham Rimokh, a participant in the Tortosa disputation of 1413–1415, held that “the more one attains the quality of intellectuality, the more one is a Jew.”⁴ The Salamancan astronomer Abraham Zacut (1452–1515) was of a similar opinion; in his Hebrew astronomical tables, he emphasized the particular Iberian Jewishness of his scientific tradition.⁵ This nexus of attachments parallels in some ways the high valuation that some medieval Jews, like Solomon Bonafed and the Jewish poets of Saragossa, placed on Hebrew poetry as the acme of Jewish cultural and religious expression.

The type of the Jewish courtier so characteristic of the Iberian milieu provides a related marker of identity: the model of a Jewish intellectual attached to the royal court as diplomat or translator, administrator or financier, physician, astronomer, or astrologer. Bonjorn del Barri and his son Jacob (Bonet) Bonjorn, for example, astronomers who settled in Perpignan, benefited over long periods of time from their association with the Aragonese kings. The Christian world offered rewards to a

skilled astronomer or physician. The Perpignan physician Leon Joseph of Carcassonne, referring to medicine as the only way for a Jew to find social (i.e., Christian) acceptance, might have said something similar about the impressive if less ubiquitous success of Jewish astronomers and astrologers attached to the court. Presumably, a Jew in that position, as Duran was, would have interacted and collaborated with others engaged in similar professional service to the king. In this way, as scholars have argued, the fields of astronomy and medicine served as “common ground” for Jews and Christians.

In sum, Iberian Jewish scientific interests were shaped by both a particular religious culture and particular societal models. So, too, were the specific fields of science (astronomy, astrology, and medicine) pursued by those, like Duran and his circle, who were affected by courtly interests and royal patronage.

But in Duran’s case there was also more. A Jew or a *converso* who participated in these activities might simultaneously—in another context—regard the “common ground” as a kind of “battleground.” Written to a coreligionist, Duran’s essay on the number seven, an exploration of how that quintessentially Jewish number underlies both the Hebrew Bible and the structure of the universe, suggestively implies that the Jewish God is responsible for both. Similarly, his calendrical work, *Heshev ha-Efod*, completed shortly after his conversion, uses astronomy to justify both the Jewish calendar and the ancient rabbis who developed it.⁶ In that work, written, too, for Jewish consumption, Duran’s central project is less to investigate the motions of the heavens as a path to knowing God, or even to appreciate the divine creation as a way of loving God, than to explain the Talmud’s seemingly arbitrary, confusing, and out-of-date laws relating to the calendar as in fact utterly rational and astronomically sophisticated. In his account, the rabbis of the Talmud constructed their highly schematic system by taking into account an astronomical reality, namely, the true conjunction of the sun and moon. As a polemical statement, that the ancient rabbis were expert astronomers argues for the superiority of the religious-national tradition that enabled so wholly accurate a view of created reality.

And there is still more, stemming from the broader intellectual formation that he shared with others of his class. Duran’s satirical letter,

Al tehi ka-avotekha, written a few years after his forced conversion, was aimed at those, both Jews and fellow *conversos*, who partook equally of his rationalist convictions. If he could prove to them that Christianity violated the canons of rationality, perhaps he could deter them from coming to accept it. Along the same lines, his more openly explicit polemic, *Kelimat ha-goyim*, resorts to a historical and linguistic exposé of the corruptions and falsities of the Christian religion and its canonical texts. His approach here relies neither on revelation nor even on received tradition. It is a rationalist critique from within, based on principles of logic, philology, and an almost humanist view of historical development.

Duran's final work, *Ma'aseh Efod*, centered on the study of the Hebrew Bible, is something else again. Here, the Duran who had mastered and applied the principles of rationalist Jewish philosophy in his younger days and is now, as a mature adult, struggling with a life turned upside down, can be seen putting his philosophical formation to use for a higher purpose, namely, saving his own soul and that of his fellow *conversos*.

All of which leads to a question. After his forced conversion, Duran remained living in Iberia as a nominal Christian, presumably successfully. It might reasonably be asked whether, in part, his way was eased precisely by his "rationalism."⁷ In other words, did being a "scientist" already imply a more relaxed and familiar relation with the Christian world and the Christian worldview, and a loosened affiliation with the Jewish world and with Judaism? I will return to this below, but it should be clear that I have argued for the opposite: namely, that Duran's loyalty to Judaism was instead closely linked to and strengthened by his intellectualism and his scientific interests. The more he valued reason, the more he valued his own Jewish identity.

Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Jews converted to Christianity for a multitude of reasons.⁸ In 1391, however, thousands found themselves baptized against their will and under threat of physical violence; some may have been dragged to the baptismal font in actual peril of their lives. In certain cases, Jews chose death, even by their own hands, rather than convert.

Among the *conversos*, we can imagine a wide variety of responses to the events of 1391, from resigned acceptance of Christianity to

vehement rejection and every variant in between. In the immediate aftermath, some, evidently finding life as nominal Christians less bearable than displacement, seem to have braved the hazards of emigration. But many others remained where they were and must have made some semblance of peace with their new existence, no doubt aided by the relatively mild attitude of the church in these early years.

But then, two decades later, in 1413–1415, in the wake of Vicent Ferrer's incendiary sermons and the outcome of the Tortosa disputation, there was still another wave of baptisms. And subsequently, the church's relatively lax policy toward the *converso* community began to harden, reaching a turning point in 1449 with attacks on *conversos* in Toledo and the early promulgation of purity-of-blood statutes, harbingers of much more draconian measures still to come.

For many understandable reasons, scholarship on the Iberian *converso* community has tended to focus on this latter period and beyond it, when a distinctive "*converso* identity" might be presumed to have developed.⁹ Only recently has the experience of the first generation, Duran's generation, begun to be examined in greater detail. Scholars have found, especially in the early, chaotic years after 1391, many Jews and *conversos* still entwined in each other's lives. Families often included both Jewish and *converso* members. Some converts attended Passover seders, others Judaized in other ways.¹⁰ The evidence thus seems to suggest that Duran's own experience might have been more emblematic of his generation than exceptional—or, to put it in other words, that at least a portion of his generation may have shared his brand of self-conscious, continued adherence to the Jewish people. Some may even have justified their behavior by means of arguments similar to those proposed by Profayt Duran.

For all, however, the encounter of the first generation of *conversos* with their new Christian existence was categorically different from that of the *conversos* who came later. Whereas the later generations would be born into a world already marked by "*converso* dualities,"¹¹ the earlier generation had been born Jews and educated as Jews, and their postconversion lives necessarily bore the imprint of those identifying facts. In that respect, too, it is not surprising that Duran should have retained such a strong sense of his Jewish identity. What perhaps is surprising is the nearly immediate emergence in his thinking of a full-fledged *converso* duality—and a theology to go with it.

Would it therefore be reasonable to speculate (as I did briefly above) that Duran's experience as a member of an elite, mobile,

urbanized, wealthy Jewish class helped prepare him, both psychologically and intellectually, for the experience of *converso* life? To take one example: the Jewish badge was mandated, but Jewish doctors and courtiers could often win exemptions from the requirement to wear it. In the case of those exempted from distinguishing signs like clothing, and enjoying some level of the anonymity that often went with urban living, there can have been few ways of being readily identified as Jews. Their identity, especially in a relatively large, cosmopolitan city like Perpignan, a crossroads and the capital of a maritime empire, must have been to some extent self-constructed. Sometimes it could have been borrowed or shifted as circumstances required.¹²

This is not to suggest that conversion was more attractive to such Jews; we know that conversion to Christianity occurred in all levels and sectors of Jewish society. Still, for the members of this group, one can indeed speculate that some ground had been prepared for the potential, if unforeseen, need to accommodate oneself intellectually and religiously to *converso* life.

To complicate matters further, with the events of 1391–1392 the question of identity suddenly became disturbingly fluid for Christians no less than for Jews. The former had long attempted to differentiate the latter on the basis of external appearance and behavior. Now there were the *conversos* to be taken into account: a population who had become Christian only under extreme duress and whose degree of sincerity and loyalty to their new faith was difficult or impossible to determine. After all, they were still inhabiting their old quarters and associating with their old acquaintances. How, then, were they to be differentiated?

In short, with the presence of a large population of *conversos* in fifteenth-century Iberia, we enter into a period of radical blurring of external boundaries, or what David Nirenberg has described as a “violent destabilization of traditional categories of religious identity.”¹³ This is a crucial point—and yet it should not lead us to oversimplify our picture of the world *prior* to 1391. That world had itself never been governed by utter clarity. Issues of religious identity were perhaps more sharply defined, but they had never been entirely uncomplicated; it is fair to surmise that some Jews of Duran’s class, intellectual formation, and professional profile might sometimes have thought and behaved as though religion were not the sole or even primary determinant of their identity.¹⁴

Duran's own "Jewish identity" remains full of significant and instructive nuance.¹⁵ On the one hand, we may postulate, both before and after his conversion, he encountered and related to Christians not merely as representatives of their religious community but as patients or relatives of patients, as servants, as clients and partners in financial transactions, as colleagues of one sort or another, and presumably in many other roles.¹⁶

On the other hand, and again both before and after his conversion, he studied with and taught other Jews. Together, they read and annotated Hebrew texts, for the most part "nonsectarian" works of astronomy and mathematics, medicine, and philosophy—although, in some of his writings about these subjects, I have also traced expressions of his polemical interests. Even before he was compelled to confront Christianity in its most insistent manifestation, he was by no means unaware of the competing narratives fostered by Christian intellectual culture.

And then, for a decade or more after his baptism, Duran retained an exceptionally strong sense of identification with the Jewish community, seems to have engaged in financial transactions and business partnerships with Jews, and continued to write as a member of the Jewish community. While living in Perpignan among people he knew and who knew his status, having some contact with members of the royal court, and dealing with official Christian notaries, he nevertheless seems simultaneously to have constructed a wholly separate Jewish identity as the "Efod," under which pseudonym he composed works in Hebrew in an intensely Jewish mode.

As noted above, the Christian authorities did not zealously prosecute Judaizing in the first couple of decades after 1391. But given his connection with the court and his official interactions with Christians either as a physician or as a moneylender, Duran may have felt Judaizing to be impossible. While it is clear from his writings that he was fiercely loyal to Judaism "in his heart," we cannot know whether or to what extent he pursued a Jewish ritual life in secret. At a minimum, if he followed the specific system laid out in *Ma'aseh Efod*, he would have retained an inner faith in the Jewish God, actualized through meditation on the Hebrew Bible and intellectual focus on its grammatical meaning and interpretation. Even while standing in front of a Christian notary and being registered in the documentary record as Honoratus de Bonafide, he could have remained faithful to his convictions, filling his mind with the words of the Jewish God, reciting

to himself and contemplating the inner truths of the divine message, and thereby affirming his stubborn allegiance not to the notary before him but to the Jewish partner beside him and the identity that internally defined them both.

In conceiving, composing, and disseminating his works, he did infinitely more than that.

APPENDIX: THE EXTANT WORKS OF PROFAYT DURAN

PHILOSOPHY

Commentary on Maimonides' *Guide*

Manuscripts: F 502: Vatican BA ebr. 429; F 352: Vatican BA ebr. 297; F 41369: Venice Comunita Israelitica; F 11670: Rome BA Or. 3; F 6860: Moscow RSL Guenzburg 180; F 28594: New York JTS 2341; F 13438: Parma BP 2434; F 11593: Paris BNF heb 705; F 22076: Oxford Bodl. Or. 605. Published in Sabionetta, 1553, Jesnitz, 1742, etc. and in editions of the traditional Hebrew translation of the *Guide*—e.g., Maimonides, *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim* . . . *'im arba'ah perushim*. Translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon. Jerusalem: S. Monson, 1904; reprint, 1960.

A fragment of the *Guide* translated into Arabic from the ibn Tibbon Hebrew is in Oxford Bodl. Opp. Add. fol. 56; in the margin are the commentaries of Shem Tov and Efodi also translated into Arabic.

EPISTLES

“On the Hebdomad”

Manuscripts: F 19971: Oxford Bodl. Mich. 528, 3r–8v; F 20527: Oxford Bodl. Reggio 42; F 13198: Parma BP 2290, 4r–9r; F 1421: Vienna Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek (ON) hebr. 151, 1r–4v; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 118v–122r. Published in *Ma'aseh Efod*, ed. Friedländer and Kohn, Vienna, 1865, 181–184 (see “Hebrew Grammar” section of this Appendix).

“On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*” (to Meir Crescas)

Manuscripts: F 19971: Oxford Bodl. Mich. 528; F 20527: Oxford Bodl. Reggio 42; F 13198: Parma BP 2290, 9r–11v; F 1421: Vienna ON hebr. 151, 5r–6r; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201. Published in *Ma'aseh Efod*, Friedländer and Kohn, 185–187.

“On Immortality and Eternal Damnation”

Manuscripts: F 1421: Vienna ON hebr. 151, 4v–5r; F 19971: Oxford Bodl. Mich. 528, 8v–13r; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr 201; F 28040: Warsaw 158, 21r. Published in *Ma’aseh Efod*, Friedländer and Kohn, 184–185.

“On the True and Median Conjunction” (to Shealtiel Gracian)

Manuscripts: F 5227: London Montefiore 262, 9v–10v; F 15717: Paris BNF héb. 1023; F 31659: Paris BNF héb. 1048, 119v–121v; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 100r–101v.

“On the Rebellion of Absalom and the Advice of Ahitophel”

Manuscript: F 11668: Paris BNF héb 743, 275v–283r. Published in *Ma’aseh Efod*, Friedländer and Kohn, 198–209.

HOMILETICS

Eulogy for Abraham b. Isaac ha-Levi of Girona (1393)

Manuscripts: F 17054: Cambridge University Add. 1188, 140r–146r; F 13198: Parma BP 2290, 24v–34v. Published (from Parma 2290) in *Ma’aseh Efod*, Friedländer and Kohn, 191–196.

HISTORY

Zikhron ha-Shemadot (lost, except for fragments), see Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden VIII: Von Maimuni’s Tod bis zur Verbannung der Juden aus Spanien und Portugal* (Leipzig, 1864), 86–90, 381–388.

POLEMICS

Al tehi ka-avotekha (c. 1395)

Manuscripts: over fifty; see the IMHM database. Published in 1577 in *Iggeret ’Ogeret*, with an introduction by Isaac Akriš and a commentary by Joseph ibn Shem Tov (1400–1469?). Published by Abraham Geiger in *Melo Chofnajim* (Berlin, 1840), 42–49, and *Qovetz Vikkuhim* (Breslau, 1844). Translated into German by Abraham Geiger in *Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie* 4, 452–458. Published with a German translation by Pinchas Mendel Heilperin in *Even Bohan* (Frankfurt am Main, 1846), 1–29. Translated into German by Bertha Badt-Strauss: *Sei nicht wie deine Väter* (Berlin, 1920). Published with a German translation by J. D. Eisenstein in *Otzar Vikkuhim* (New York, 1928). Translated into German by Karl Schwarz in *Jüdische Bücherei* (Berlin, 1929). Translated into English (selectively) by Franz Kobler in *Letters of Jews through the Ages from*

Biblical Times to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century (London: Ararat and East & West Library, 1953), 276–282; reprinted in *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter*, ed. Frank E. Talmage (New York: KTAV, 1975), 119–123. Translated into English by Daniel F. Polish, M.A. thesis for Hebrew Union College (1968). Critical edition by Frank Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center and Dinur Center, 1981). Translated into Catalan by Eduard Feliu, “Profiat Duran: Al tehi ka-avotekha,” *Calls* 1 (1986): 53–77.

Kelimat ha-goyim (c. 1397)

Manuscripts: over fifty; see the IMHM database. Published by Adolf Posnanski: *Ha-Zofeh me-Eretz ha-Ger* 3 (1914), 102–113, 143–180, 4 (1915), 37–48, 81–96, 115–123; critical discussion, “*Sefer Kelimat ha-Goyim, Hibbero Maestro Profiyat Duran mi-Perpinyano bi-shnat 5157*,” *Ha-Zofeh me-Eretz ha-Ger* 3 (1914), 99–101, 4 (1915), 125–132. Translated into English by Adele Berlin in a Harvard thesis. Critical edition by Frank Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center and Dinur Center, 1981).

[*Teshuvot be-Anshei Aven*, published in José Vicente Nicolás Albarracín, ed. and trans., *Profiat Durán: Cinco Cuestiones Debatidas de Polémica*, Madrid: Aben Ezra Ediciones, 1999, is unlikely to be by Duran, instead probably by a student or disciple.]

JEWISH CALENDAR

Heshev ha-Efod (1395)

Manuscripts: F 19332: Oxford Bodl. Reggio 43, 11–49v; F 16309: Cambridge University Add. 391, 4, 214–252; F 13625: Parma BP 2776, 99r–130v; F 1107: Munich BS hebr. 299, 11–44v; F 47738: Moscow RSL Guenzburg 453; F 2953: Paris BNF héb. 351; F 30422: Warsaw Zydowski Instytut Historyczny 61; F 790: Mantua CI ebr. X, 43r–85v. Published (extract on the *shemittah* year and other passages) by Herschell Filipowski in Abraham bar Hiyya’s *Sod ha-‘Ibbur* (London, 1851), 121. Published (introduction and chapter 23) in *Ma’aseh Efod*, Friedländer and Kohn, 43–44 (German section). Published (introduction and chapter 10, from Cambridge Add. 391 and Bodleian Reggio 43) by Yehudah Herskovitz in *Yeshurun* 9 (2001): 772–785.

HEBREW GRAMMAR

Ma’aseh Efod (1403)

Manuscripts: over fifty; see the IMHM database. Published as *Ma’aseh*

Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran, edited by Jonathan Friedländer and Jakob Kohn (Vienna: Holzwarth, 1865). Published with an English translation (chapter 8) by Benzion Halper in *Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature: An Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1921). Published (introduction) by Dov Rappel, “*Haqdamat Sefer Ma’aseh Efod shel Profiat Duran*,” *Sinai* 100 (1987): 749–795. Paraphrased in Catalan by Eduard Feliu, “*La gramàtica com a pretext: El Ma’ase Efod de Profiat Duran*,” *Anuari de Filologia* 14 (1991): 103–115. Translated into French (introduction, abridged) by Florence Touati, *Préface au Maasse-Efod de Profiat Duran* (1403): *Traduction et commentaire* (Barcelona: MRR, 2007).

ASTRONOMY

Hilluf ha-yamim ve-ha-leilot

Manuscripts: F 15025: Paris BNF héb. 1026, 31v–40v; F 19383: Leiden Or. 4781 (Warn 43), 30–33; F 18131: Milan Biblioteca Ambrosiana D 114 Inf, 24r–29r.

Ta’ame luhot ha-tiqqunim

Manuscript: F 121: Rome Biblioteca Casanatense 3093, 97r–101v.

Note on *Sefer Or ‘Olam* by Joseph ibn Naḥmias

Manuscript: F 22731: Oxford Bodleian Library Ms. Canonici Misc. 334, 100v.

Commentary on the Epitome of the *Almagest* (Averroes)

Manuscripts: F 15025: Paris BNF héb. 1026, 1r–29r (E); F 19296: Oxford Bodl. Opp. Add. fol. 17, 104r–172v (R); F 785: Mantua CI ebr. IV (S); F 26859: Paris BNF héb. 903, 44r–113r (T); F 465: Vatican BA ebr. 384, 142r–153v.

MATHEMATICS

Commentary on “On Two Lines”

Manuscripts: F 15716: Paris BNF héb. 1021, 67–70v; F 15025: Paris BNF héb. 1026, 44v–50r.

MEDICINE

Commentary on book 1 of Avicenna’s *Canon*

Manuscript: F 14650: Paris BNF héb. 1047, 255v–270r.

COMMENTARIES ON ABRAHAM IBN EZRA

On a passage in *Sefer ha-Shem*:

Manuscripts: F 30737: Paris BNF héb. 831, 316–317; F 1463: Vienna ON 201, 1071–107v.

On a riddle poem:

Manuscripts: F 7294: London Montefiore 10, 11–2v; F 47609: Moscow Ginzburg 341, 381–401; F 13198: Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290, 11v–15v; F 13245: Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2380, 1191–120v; F 75725: Boesky 67, 1511–1541; F 42389: New York JTS Rab. 955, 101–111; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 115v–1181; F 15877: Cambridge Add. 539, 1581–159v; F 17078: Cambridge Add. 1215, 11–51; F 28571: New York JTS 2318, 601–68v; F 17804: Florence Laurenziana Plut. II 42, 58v–591; F 19978: Oxford Bodleian Library MS Mich. 259, 1271–1291; F 21611: Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bold. Or. 620, 94v–95v; F 3190: Paris Alliance H 118 A, 48v–511. Published in *Beth Talmud*, vol. 2, 179–183.

On the poem “*Eḥad levado*”:

Manuscript: F 13198: Parma BP 2290, 1v–41. Published in *Literaturblatt der Orient*, M. Dukes, 1846, 486, and in *Ta’am Zekenim*, ed. Eliezer Ashkenazi, Frankfurt am Main, 1854, 78a–78b.

SUPERCOMMENTARIES ON IBN EZRA’S
BIBLE COMMENTARY

On Balaq (Num. 22): F 13198: Parma BP 2290, 161–221; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 122v–1261. Published (selection) in *Ma’aseh Efod* (German section), 47–48.

On Emor (Lev. 23:24): F 13198: Parma BP 2290; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 1291–1301.

On Ha’azinu (Deut. 32:4–5): F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 1301.

On Shemot (Ex. 1): F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 130v.

On Yitro (Ex. 20:1): F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 130v.

On Terumah (Ex. 25:40): F 30737: Paris BNF héb. 831, 3181–318v; F 16372: Oxford Bodl. Poc. 183, 3531–3541; F 1463: Vienna ON hebr. 201, 1321.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Some of those transactions included Mosse Alfaquim, others Mosse's brother Cresques.

2. The most common transliteration of Duran's name is Profiat, reflecting an old speculative vocalization of the Hebrew letters. I follow the spelling "Profayt" used in the notarial archives. However, I also bow to common practice in referring to him as "Duran," despite the fact that Duran was not his "last name" in the modern sense. As was common in late medieval Catalonia, firstborn sons were given the name of their fathers, but in reverse order. Thus Duran Profayt was Profayt Duran's father's name and would normally have been the name of his firstborn son in turn. I also avoid the appellation "Efodi" as a later bibliographical accretion; his students referred to him as Efod, as he does himself.

3. For a detailed account from the royal perspective, see Benjamin R. Gampel, "Unless the Lord Watches over the City . . .": Joan of Aragon and His Jews, June–October 1391," in *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. E. Carlebach and J. J. Schacter (Leiden, 2011), 65–89. Also, for an excellent description of the riots and their immediate aftermath, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 217–228.

4. Ram Ben-Shalom, "Kiddush ha-Shem and Jewish Martyrology in Aragon and Castile in the Year 5151 (1391): Between Sepharad and Ashkenaz" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 70 (2001): 227–282.

5. Philip Daileader, *True Citizens: Violence, Money and Identity in the Medieval Community of Perpignan, 1162–1397* (Leiden, 2000), 135.

6. *Ibid.*, 139.

7. Philippe Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain: Social Crisis or Not?" *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 4–18; Daileader, *True Citizens*, 117, 201; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961–1966), 2, 108–109.

8. Duran is recorded in the archives of Perpignan from 1372 until 1392, when he appears as a convert to Christianity, Honoratus de Bonafide, spelled variously also as Honorat or Bonafidey or Bona Fide. As Honoratus, he is recorded as being in Perpignan on and off until 1411 (Archives Départementales des

Pyrenées Orientales [ADPO] 3.E.1 5094, f. 50). He last figures in the registers as a Jew on April 18, 1391 (ADPO 3.E.1 2242, f. 36); on March 20, 1392 (3.E.1 504, f. 16), there appears a *magister Honoratus de Bonafe*. See Richard Emery, “New Light on Profayt Duran ‘The Efodi,’” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58 (1968): 328–337. I have supplemented the data in Emery’s articles with information found in his note cards currently housed in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Columbia University. See also Richard Emery, “The Wealth of Perpignan Jewry in the Early Fifteenth Century,” in *Les Juifs dans l’Histoire de France*, ed. M. Yardeni (Leiden, 1980), 78–85, and “Jewish Physicians in Medieval Perpignan,” *Michael* 12 (1991): 113–134.

9. For bibliographic information on all these works, see the Appendix.

10. Eulogy for Abraham b. Isaac ha-Levi of Girona, in *Ma’aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 197. Cf. Ex. 17:14. All translations from the Hebrew are mine unless otherwise specified.

11. “The *efod* atones for idolatry, as it is said, *and there are no efod and terafim* (Hos. 3:4). Behold the method of atonement in all of these [cases] is of the second [type], namely: the atonement is similar to that which requires atonement, and this is clear for all of them except for the *efod*, which requires clarification—that is, the intention and purpose of the *efod* was to know the future, as it is said *bring hither the efod* (1 Sam. 23:9). As one of the intentions of idolatry—as its adherents think—is to see the future, this is why the atonement of the *efod* must be [interpreted] in the abovementioned way [i.e., as being similar to the sin it atones for].” Eulogy, 194.

12. Geiger simply asserts that the baptism never happened. Abraham Geiger, *Melo Chofnajim* (Berlin, 1840), 101. Baer, too, pronounced himself incapable of believing that the author of so cutting a work as *Al tehi ka-avotekha* could have converted to a religion he loathed. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* 2, 152.

13. Emery, “New Light,” 336.

14. Ibid.

15. Eduard Feliu, “Profiat Duran: *Al tehi ka-avotekha*,” *Calls* 1 (1986): 53–77; Frank Talmage, “The Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran,” *Immanuel* 13 (1981): 69–85.

16. For example, the fifteenth-century Italian copy of *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, MS Florence Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. 88.14, f. 1r: A copy of the writing that maestre Profayt of Perpignan sent to maestre David bon Jo[r]n, “טופס הכתב אשר שלח מאישטרי פרופיט ׳ן דוראן מפירפיניאן למישטרי דוד בון גאן.”

17. MS Oxford Bodleian Mich. Add. 30: כל מי׳ ההנה סברתי מאומה היהודית כל מי׳ פבלו שהוא ככוכב שנתחכם מהם ולא הוקשה עורפו הרע הוא יועתק אל דתינו הקדושה תראה למא׳ פבלו שהוא ככוכב בשמים אשר היה מכונה דון שלמה הלוי תראה למא׳ אונוראט שהוא ראש החכמים אשר היה מכונה מא׳ פרופיט תראה לרעך מא׳ אנריאה בנידיטו אשר היה מכונה מא׳ שלמה לוי כלם הועתקו אל דת האמת ולתשלום נפשותיהם. Giulio Busi and Saverio Campanini, “Marco Lippomano and Crescas Meir: A Humanistic Dispute in Hebrew,” in *Una Manna Buona per Mantova: Man Tov le-Man Tovah*, ed. M. Perani (Mantua, 2004), 169–202, 185. In his response, Crescas Meir does not defend the three *conversos* more than very briefly, but he does defend them: “Indeed to enlighten

you about what seems to me to be some of the reason for the apparent change [of religion] among them, in this matter I will not go on at length, [except to say] that it was a temporary measure. But the heart is the essential thing, for everything depends on it.” אמנם להשכילך במה שיראה לי מסבת ההעתק הנראה בהם בענין [of religion] שהכל תלוי בו. האמונה לא אאריך בה ואם אומר כי הוראת שעה היתה והלב הוא העקר שהכל תלוי בו. Busi and Campanini, “Marco Lippomano and Crescas Meir,” 202. See Daniel Stein Kokin, “Isaac ha-Kohen’s Letter to Marco Lippomano: Jewish-Christian Exchange and Arabic Learning in Renaissance Italy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104 (2014): 192–233.

18. See Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within—the Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); and David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia, 1996).

PART ONE

1. Danièle Iancu-Agou, “Les communautés juives méridionales contemporaines de Gersonide: Orange, Avignon,” in *Gersonide en son temps: Science et philosophie médiévales*, ed. G. Dahan (Paris, 1991), 9–31, 28.

2. See, for example, José Chabás, *L’astronomie de Jacob ben David Bonjorn* (Barcelona, 1992); Y. Tzvi Langermann, “Science in the Jewish Communities in the Iberian Peninsula,” in *The Jews and the Sciences in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, UK, 1999), 1–54; Bernard R. Goldstein, “Astronomy in the Medieval Spanish Jewish Community,” in *Between Demonstration and Imagination: Essays in the History of Science and Philosophy Presented to John D. North*, ed. L. Nauta and A. Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1999), 225–241; José Chabás and Bernard R. Goldstein, *Astronomy in the Iberian Peninsula: Abraham Zacut and the Transition from Manuscript to Print* (Philadelphia, 2000).

3. José Chabás, “The University of Salamanca and the Renaissance of Astronomy During the Second Half of the 15th Century,” in *Universities and Science in the Early Modern Period*, ed. M. Feingold and V. Navarro-Brotóns (Dordrecht, 2006), 29–36, 32, 35.

4. Jeanne Vielliard, “Horloges et horlogers catalans à la fin du Moyen Age,” *Bulletin Hispanique* 63 (1961): 161–168, 166; Gabriel Llompart and Jaume Riera i Sans, “Jafudà Cresques I Samuel Corcós: Més documents sobre els jueus pintors de cartes de navegar (Mallorca, s. XIV),” *Bolletí de la Societat Arqueològica Lul·liana* 40 (1984): 341–350.

5. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Iberian Science in the Renaissance: Ignored How Much Longer?” *Perspectives on Science* 12 (2004): 86–124; David C. Goodman, “The Scientific Revolution in Spain and Portugal,” in *The Scientific Revolution in National Context*, ed. R. Porter and M. Teich (Cambridge, UK, 1988), 158–177; Beatriz Helena Domingues, “Spain and the Dawn of Modern Science,” *Metascience* 7 (1998): 298–312.

CHAPTER 1

1. Richard W. Emery, “New Light on Profayt Duran ‘The Efodi,’” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58 (1968): 328–37, 330.

2. Miguel Angel Motis Dolader, "Las comunidades judías de la Corona de Aragón en el siglo XV: Demografía," in *Judíos, sefarditas, conversos: La expulsión de 1492 y sus consecuencias* (Valladolid, 1995), 32–46, 34; Philip Daileader, *True Citizens: Violence, Memory and Identity in the Medieval Community of Perpignan, 1162–1397* (Leiden, 2000), 122; David Abulafia, *A Mediterranean Emporium: The Catalan Kingdom of Majorca* (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 94.

3. Daileader, *True Citizens*, 10.

4. See Claude Denjean, *Juifs et Chrétiens: De Perpignan à Puigcerdà XIIIe–XIVe siècles* (Canet, 2004).

5. Noël Coulet, "Frontières incertaines: Les juifs de Provence au Moyen Âge," *Provence Historique* 35 (1985): 371–376; Isadore Twersky, "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," *Journal of World History* 11 (1968): 185–207.

6. For these interconnections, see, among others, Sílvia Planas i Marcé, "La vida cotidiana en el Call de Girona en el siglo IV: Nuevas aportaciones documentales," in *Juderías y sinagogas de la Sefarad medieval*, ed. A. M. López Álvarez and R. Izquierdo Benito (Cuenca, 2003), 253–293, 279; Manuel Grau i Monserrat, *La Judería de Besalú (Girona) siglos XIII al XV* (Barcelona, 1975); Alícia Marcet i Juncosa, *Breu història de les terres Catalanes del nord* (Perpignan, 1988); David Romano, ed., *Per a una Història de la Girona Jueva*, 2 vols (Girona, 1988); Danièle Iancu-Agou, "Affinités historiques et interferences culturelles chez les communautés juives de l'espace occitano-catalan," in *Mossé ben Nahman i el seu temps, simposi commemoratiu del vuitè centenari del seu naixement, 1194–1994* (Girona, 1995), 113–140; and Béatrice Leroy, *Les Juifs du bassin de l'Èbre* (Biarritz, 1997).

7. Leroy, *Les Juifs du bassin de l'Èbre*, especially chapter 5; Yom Tov Assis describes the close "family, commercial, cultural, educational and halakhic ties" between southern France and Aragon in his "Juifs de France réfugiés en Aragon (XIIIe–XIVe siècles)," *Revue des études juives* 142 (1983): 285–322; Richard W. Emery, *The Jews of Perpignan in the Thirteenth Century: An Economic Study Based on Notarial Records* (New York, 1959), 11–13.

8. Menahem ha-Meiri, *Magen Avot*, ed. I. Last (London, 1909).

9. Barry Mesch, *Studies in Joseph ibn Caspi: Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Exegete* (Leiden, 1975); Maurice R. Hayoun, *La philosophie et la theologie de Moïse de Narbonne* (Tübingen, 1989).

10. Ma'aseh Efod: *Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 18 (Duran's works are cited in the Appendix; unless otherwise noted, each specific citation to the work is to this edition); Yoel Marciano, "From Aragon to Castile: The Origins of Sephardi Talmudic Speculation in Fifteenth-Century Spain" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 77 (2009): 573–600, 588–590, 592–597.

11. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 11.

12. For example, MS Paris BNF héb 1026, f. 21v. "There seems here to be an error; instead of 'the encompassing [sphere],' it should say the 'rotating [sphere],' and that is what appears in Arabic in this place." I am grateful to Julianne Lay for alerting me to this aspect of the commentary.

13. Much work has been done on the physicians of medieval Iberia and Provence, including by Richard W. Emery, "Jewish Physicians in Medieval Perpignan," *Michael* 12 (1991): 113–134; more generally see the works of Joseph Shatzmiller, Michael McVaugh, and Luís García-Ballester. Emery's archival evidence shows that Duran could have been born anywhere between 1340 and 1360, but he concludes that the earlier date is more likely on the basis of an incorrect identification of Duran's student Meir Crescas with a resident of Perpignan who died before 1380. Emery, "New Light," 331.

14. Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley, 1994).

15. Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213–1327* (London, 1997), 129; Daileader, *True Citizens*, 131; Danièle Iancu-Agou, "Les médecins juifs en Provence au XVe siècle: Practiciens, notables, et lettrés," *Yod* 26 (1988): 33–43.

16. Iancu-Agou, "Les communautés juives méridionales," 18–28.

17. MS Paris BNF héb 1047, ff. 255v–270r.

18. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 2, 17, 43, 140, 191, 193.

19. Eulogy for Abraham b. Isaac ha-Levi of Girona, in *Ma'aseh Efod*, 191–192.

20. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 25.

21. Dov Schwartz, "Toward Research into Philosophical Circles in Pre-Expulsion Spain and Provence," *Trumah* 12 (2002): 113–132, 117.

22. *Ibid.*, 118–120.

23. Duran on the *Guide*, I.69, 103a; I.72, 112a.

24. Emery, "New Light," 336.

25. MS Oxford Bodleian Or. 100, f. 101r. See Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900* (Cambridge, UK, 2008), 51, 83–84.

26. Juliane Lay, "L'Abrégé de l'Almageste: Un inédit d'Averroès en version hébraïque," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 6 (1996): 23–61, 30.

27. Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales (ADPO) 3.E.1 457, 52; 2239, 56v–59v.

28. Rebecca Lynn Winer, *Women, Wealth and Community in Perpignan, c. 1250–1300* (Aldershot, UK, 2006), 91.

29. Emery, "New Light," 330–331, 335–336.

30. *Ibid.*, 330; Richard W. Emery, "Documents Concerning Some Jewish Scholars in Perpignan in the Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries," *Michael* 4 (1976): 27–48, 40–41.

31. Emery, "New Light," 336. September 30, 1387, Duran appears as a member of the *aljama* but not as a *consiliarius*.

32. Yom Tov Assis, *The Jews of Tortosa, 1373–1492: Regesta of Documents from the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Tarragona* (Jerusalem, 1991), xii–xiii.

33. Eulogy; see also Eleazar Gutwirth, "Religion and Social Criticism in Late Medieval Rousillon: An Aspect of Profayt Duran's Activities," *Michael* 12 (1991): 135–156, 145–150.

34. Haim Beinart, "The *Conversos* and Their Fate," in *Spain and the Jews*, ed. E. Kedourie (London, 1992), 92–122, 92–93; David Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Past & Present* 174 (2002): 3–41.

35. Dov Rappel, "*Haqdamat sefer Ma'aseh Efod le-Profiat Duran*," *Sinai* 100 (1987): 749–795, 749 (cited in the Appendix).

36. Daileader, *True Citizens*, 134. Emery, "New Light," 330.

37. Yom Tov Assis, ed., *The Tortosa Disputation: Regesta of Documents from the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Fernando I, 1412–1416* (Jerusalem, 1998), xxx.

38. David Nirenberg, "Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain," *Common Knowledge* 9 (2003): 137–155, 140.

39. Dora Zsom, *Conversos in the Responsa of Sephardic Halakhic Authorities in the 15th Century* (Piscataway, NJ, 2014), 160. See also Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Social Context of Apostasy Among Fifteenth-Century Spanish Jewry," in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. J. Cohen and M. Rosman (Oxford, 2009), 73–198, 181–184.

40. Emery, "New Light," 336.

41. ADPO 3E1 272, f. 67. I am relying for the reading of this document on Emery's note card.

42. Emery, "New Light," 336.

43. For the dating of this text, see Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century* (New York, 1966). I would tend to push the date later, at least past 1394, since *Al tehi ka-avotekha* refers several times to an individual named Paul who seems to be our apostate Jew Solomon ha-Levi, known as Pablo de Santa Maria (c. 1355–1435) and later to become the bishop of Burgos. Duran describes the following situation: "We learned from rumor that there in Avignon he thought to speak deceit about the Jews and he was commanded by the lord the cardinal of Pamplona and by two other deputies secretly that he should not devise any evil against the children of Israel, and the congregation gave him twenty-five florins. The opinion of the lord the Pope and all the church was to give to him some special bishopric or to make him a cardinal" (*Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage [Jerusalem, 1981], 73–84, 82). A Christian tradition dates Pablo's conversion to July 21, 1390, and it appears that he left for Paris immediately upon his conversion; there he studied until 1394, when he was ordained and settled in Avignon. Judith Gale Krieger, "Pablo de Santa María: His Epoch, Life and Hebrew and Spanish Literary Production" (PhD. diss., UCLA, 1988), 57–59, 65. The pope referred to is likely Benedict XIII, a patron of Pablo's in later years, who himself only ascended to the papacy in September 1394. Also see Yosi Yisraeli, "Constructing and Undermining Converso Jewishness: Profiat Duran and Pablo de Santa María," in *Religious Conversion: History, Experience and Meaning*, ed. I. Katzenelsen and M. Rubin (Farnham, UK, 2014), 185–215.

44. See Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961–1966), vol. 2, 474–475, note 41; Frank Talmage, "The Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran," *Immanuel* 13 (1981): 69–85; Jeremy Cohen,

“Profiat Duran’s *The Reproach of the Gentiles* and the Development of Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic,” in *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume: Studies on the History of the Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance Period* (Tel Aviv, 1993), 71–84; Joel Rembaum, “Medieval Jewish Criticism of the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 7–8 (1982–1983): 353–382; Eleazar Gutwirth, “History and Apologetics in XVth C. Hispano-Jewish Thought,” *Helmantica* 35 (1984): 231–242; Christoph Ochs, *Matthaeus Adversus Christianos: The Use of the Gospel of Matthew in Jewish Polemics Against the Divinity of Jesus* (Tübingen, 2013), 257–289.

45. For the dating, see Netanyahu, *Marranos*, 221–223; Hasdai Crescas, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles by Hasdai Crescas*, trans. D. J. Lasker (Albany, 1992), 4.

46. See, for example, Robert Chazan, “Maestre Alfonso de Valladolid and the New Missionizing,” *REJ* 143 (1984): 83–94; Norman Roth, “Isaac Polgar y su libro contra un converso,” in *Polémica Judeo-Cristiana: Estudios*, ed. C. del Valle Rodríguez (Madrid, 1997), 67–73; Carlos del Valle, “El Libro de las Batallas de Dios, de Abner de Burgos,” also in del Valle Rodríguez, *Polémica Judeo-Cristiana*, 75–119; and Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia, 2012).

47. Ram Ben-Shalom, “Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages,” *AJS Review* 27 (2003): 23–72.

48. See the bibliographies in *Profiat Durán: Cinco Cuestiones Debatidas de Polémica*, ed. and trans. J. V. Niclós Albarracín (Madrid, 1999), 88–89, note 23 (cited in the Appendix); and in Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos*.

49. Frank Talmage, “Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch,” *Medieval Studies* 47 (1985): 379–415; Eleazar Gutwirth, “Towards Expulsion: 1391–1492,” in *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience, 1492 and After*, ed. E. Kedourie (London, 1992), 51–73.

50. See Emery, “Jewish Physicians in Medieval Perpignan,” and “The Wealth of Perpignan Jewry in the Early Fifteenth Century,” in *Les Juifs dans l’histoire de France*, ed. M. Yardeni (Leiden, 1980), 78–85.

51. ADPO 3E1 1574, 25v.

52. Amada López de Meneses, “Crescas de Viviers, astrólogo de Juan I el Cazador,” *Sefarad* 14 (1954): 99–115, 103. For other examples of Jews serving in various royal functions, see Gutwirth, “Towards Expulsion: 1391–1492,” 61.

53. See Daniel Abrams, “From Germany to Spain: Numerology as a Mystical Technique,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996): 85–101.

54. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290, ff. 22r–23v.

55. Cf. Deut. 32:31; I Sam. 2:2.

56. Since “Levites” has to be plural for the meter to work, the reading should probably be “house of Hasdai,” which can be construed as a group and therefore plural.

57. MS Mantua CI ebr X, f. 87r; printed in *Ma’aseh Efod*, German section, 44.

58. See Hasdai Crescas, *Or ha-Shem*, ed. S. Fisher (Jerusalem, 1990), III.1.7.1, 262; Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, trans. H. N. Strickman and A. M. Silver (New York, 1988), commentary on Ex. 28:6, Gen. 31:19.

59. See Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden, 2003), 137–139.

60. MS Mantua CI ebr X, 96v.

61. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2776. Quoted in *Ma'aseh Efod*, 40, note 4. See also Leopold Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* (Berlin, 1845), 462–464.

62. Feliu asserts that the dedicatee of *Heshev ha-Efod* was a Hasdai ha-Levi, physician of Henry III of Castile. Eduard Feliu, “Profiat Duran: Al tehi ka-avotekha,” *Calls* 1 (1986): 53–77, 57. Friedländer and Kohn argue the man was Moses Zarzal, another royal physician. I see no convincing evidence for either of these claims.

63. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 17: “I also saw the wise youths, seedlings of dominion to some of the high and lofty, sons of degree, who already had begun the study of this science [of grammar], and since it was precious in their eyes I feared lest they be confused in their study of it, they too, like all the mass of those who study and those who teach in this time . . . the choice ones of the wise students, Levites of the sons of Hasdai.”

64. For the manuscripts see the Appendix.

65. Frank Talmage, “The Francesc de Sant Jordi–Solomon Bonafed Letters,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 337–364, 339–340; Armand Kaminka “Shirim u-melitsot le-ha-Rav Shelomoh ben ha-Rav-Reuven Bonafed,” *Ha-Tsofeh le-Hokhmat Yisrael* 12 (1928): 40–42.

66. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290, f. 1v. הביאור חבדו החכם הגדול מאישטרי רופייית הלוי לבקשת שני כרובי האבילים מגדולי הארץ וממיוחסיה בני בן בבגשת הגדולים 'ולהפיק פרופייית הלוי לבקשת שני כרובי האבילים מגדולי הארץ וממיוחסיה בני בן בבגשת הגדולים' רומתה See Eleazar Gutwirth, “Profayt Duran on Ahitofel: The Practice of Jewish History in Late Medieval Spain,” *Jewish History* 4 (1989), 59–74, 72, note 9.

67. Ana María Bejarano Escanilla, “Un testimonio judío de la filosofía antigua en la Cataluña del siglo XV,” in *Homenatge a Josep Alsina: Actes del Xè simposi de la secció Catalana de la SEEC*, vol. 2, ed. E. Artigas (Tarragona, 1992), 344–348. See also Arturo Prats, “A Letter of Consolation by Solomon Bonafed (Fifteenth Century),” *Comparative Literature Studies* 45 (2008): 182–209.

68. Judit Targarona Borrás and Raymond P. Scheindlin, “Literary Correspondence Between Vidal Benvenist Ben Lavi and Solomon ben Meshulam de Piera,” *Revue des études juives* 160 (2001): 61–133, 64–67.

69. Oxford Bodleian Library MS Reggio 43, 1r.

70. David Kaufmann, “La famille de Yehiel de Pise,” *Revue des études juives* 26 (1893): 83–110, 98.

71. On Feb. 1, 1404, Honoratus is present in Perpignan (ADPO 3E.2152, 10), but there is nothing further until 1409, when his proctor Cresques Alphaquim collects a debt on his behalf, which Honoratus only confirms on

May 6, 1411 (ADPO 3E.5094, 50). The document is not in good shape; I am relying for the reading on Emery's note card.

72. Fernando Serrano Lerráyo, *Medicina y enfermedad en la corte de Carlos III El Noble de Navarra* (1387–1425) (Pamplona, 2004), 58–60, 94, 134. See also Honoratus's actual (!) signature from a 1406 document reproduced on page 59.

73. Máximo Diago Hernando, "La movilidad de los judíos a ambos lados de la frontera entre las Coronas de Castilla y Aragón durante el siglo XIV," *Sefarad* 63 (2003): 237–282.

74. Francisco M. Gimeno Blay, *El Compromiso de Caspe* (1412) *diario del proceso, Fuentes históricas aragonesas* 63 (Zaragoza, 2012), 93–98, 217. The relevant passage from the Latin text reads: "Eadem, autem, die veneris in sero, dicti domini Archiepiscopus Terrachonensis, Episcopus Oscensis, Prior majoris Domus Cartusie, Franciscus d'Aranda, magister Vincencius Ferrarii et Bernardus de Gualbis, in aula dicti castri de Casp personaliter congregati, ad se venire fecerunt magistrum Honoratum Bonafidei, ville Perpiniani, et magistrum Geronimum, ville Alcanicii, físicos, quibus per organum dicti domini Archiepiscopi Terracone dixerunt quod cum nobilis Franciscus de Perilionibus, miles, requisivisset eosdem et alios condeputatos ipsorum quod honorabilem Januarium Rabaça, militem socerum ipsius Francisci, alterum ex Novem Personis electis ad investigandum et publicandum nostrum verum regem et dominum, tamquam infructuosum et inutilem dictis negociis licenciarent vel abire permitterent, cum esset vel propter senectutem vel propter itineris fatigationem aut alio quovis accidente vel casu a mente et recto iudicio ac bona ratione alienus" (289–290). It is not clear whether Rabasa was suffering from a true illness or whether the diagnosis was politically motivated in some way. Rafael Narbona Vizcaíno, "Los Rabassa, un linaje patricio de Valencia medieval," *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante. Historia Medieval* 7 (1989): 111–136, 126; see also Pedro Gómez Martí, "Sobre un síntoma mental de Giner Rabassa," *III Congrès d'història de la Corona d'Aragó* (Valencia, 1923), 273–278.

75. See also Feliu, "Profiat Duran," 55.

76. Moisés Orfali, *El tratado "de Iudaicis Erroribus Ex talmut" de Jerónimo de Santa Fe* (Madrid, 1987), 4. It is often stated in the scholarship that he was from Lorca, but aside from the Hebrew appellation ha-Lorqi, there is no actual evidence that this was the case. It is also possible that ha-Lorqi is in fact a Hebrew mangling of Alcanyís (1–2).

77. Arxiu del Regne de València *Protocolo* 2144, 1433; cf. Vicente Graullera Sanz, *Derecho y juristas valencianos en el siglo XV* (Valencia, 2009), 133. I am deeply grateful to Vicente Graullera Sanz for helping me obtain and interpret this document.

78. See Michael A. Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers: Astrology and Authority in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Ithaca, 2011).

79. For Fernando's anti-Jewish attitudes, see Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison, 1995), 48–49.

80. Mark D. Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 22–64.

81. Emery, "New Light," 334, note 24.
82. Mark D. Meyerson, "Samuel of Granada and the Dominican Inquisitor: Jewish Magic and Jewish Heresy in Post-1391 Valencia," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. S. J. McMichael and S. E. Myers (Leiden, 2004), 161–189, 162, note 2; Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance*, 35; Raphael Patai, "Raymund de Tarrega—Marrano, Heretic, Alchemist," *Ambix* 35 (1988): 14–30.
83. Yom Tov Assis, "The Papal Inquisition and Aragonese Jewry in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Medieval Studies* 49 (1987): 391–410, 405.
84. Daileader, *True Citizens*, 129.
85. Assis, "Juifs de France," 303–305.
86. Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance*, 38.
87. David Nirenberg, "Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain," *Common Knowledge* 9 (2003): 137–155, 140–145.
88. Meyerson, "Samuel of Granada," 180.
89. Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos*, 3, note 1. It also includes the words "le-Hasdai" which could be (and sometimes were) taken to mean that the work itself was by Hasdai Crescas.
90. יצוה אל חסדו לחדש את חלדו ואפד ומדו לכהן באורים.
91. See Targarona Borrás and Scheindlin, "Literary Correspondence."
92. See Adolf Posnanski, "*Sefer Kelimat ha-Goyim*, Hibbero Maestro Profiyat Duran mi-Perpinyano bi-Shnat 5157," *Ha-Zofeh me-Eretz ha-Ger* 3 (1914): 99–101, 4 (1915): 125–132; and Talmage, *Kitvei polmos* and "The Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran."
93. See José Vicente Niclós Albarracín and Marta Rauret Domènech, "Aspectos gramaticales en el Evangelio en hebreo de 'La Piedra de Toque' de ibn Shaprut," *Liber Annuus* 51 (2001), 145–182.
94. José Vicente Niclós Albarracín, *Shem Tob ibn Shaprut, "La Piedra de Toque" (Eben Bohan): Una obra de controversia judeo-cristiana* (Madrid, 1996). Niclós Albarracín suggests that the twelfth chapter, possibly by ibn Shaprut but not necessarily, was probably considered a separate pamphlet (64, note 233) and was added as an appendix to the Casanatense and Vatican manuscripts. The principles 5–8 were added as an appendix to a Florence Laurentiana MS (64–65, note 234).
95. In Posnanski, "*Sefer Kelimat ha-Goyim*," 4:130. The main points of this "treatise" were matched by Posnanski to sections in *Kelimat ha-goyim*. According to Niclós Albarracín, this passage appears at the end of two MSS: Rome Casanatense 3099 (completed in 1405), and Vatican ebr. 523, ff. 115a–123a (copied in 1590). Niclós Albarracín, *Shem Tob ibn Shaprut*, 42, 46–47.
96. This is in the introduction to his commentary on *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, where he describes the general method thus: מאמר מי שחשב לעשות מחלוקת לפי מאמר האומר ("one who thought to make a controversy according to the speaker's [own] words"). And the book itself: ודרך על זו השלימות החכם הפילוסוף אשר חבר האגרת הזאת אשר חשבתי לפרש עתה בג'ה י"ח בספרו הידוע בספר הכלימה והוא מאמר נכבד מאד יגדולהו השם עליו כי לא ראיתי כמותו בשלימות ובמעלה וכבוד ("And in this way of

perfection the sage, the philosopher, who composed this letter (which I have thought to commentate now with God's help) [is] in his famous book, the *Sefer ha-klimah*, and it is a very honored treatise, may the Lord be increased by it, for I have not seen its like in perfection and in elevation and glory.") This is from a fifteenth-century Sephardic manuscript (MS Paris BNF 262, f. 108v). The identification is less explicit in the version published by Akrish. However, the anonymous and undated author of the work called *Teshuvot be-Anshe Aven* writes: "just as the *Efod* interprets in one of the chapters that he composed to reveal their ignominy and the shame of their religion" וכמו שהפוד מפרקיו שחיבר לגלות חרפתם וחרפת דתם (Teshuvah III, 5). Nicolás Albarracín, *Profiat Durán*, 76, 98.

97. Emery, "New Light."

98. Vatican ebr. 543: ד"ר איצק קברית על ספר הדקדוק חברו אפי"ד ("Verses composed by maestre Isaac Cabrit on the grammar book that the *Efod* wrote").

99. Emery, "Jewish Physicians in Medieval Perpignan." See also Antonio Cardoner y Planas, *Historia de la medicina a la Corona d'Aragó (1162–1479)* (Barcelona, 1973), 275; Emery, "Documents Concerning Some Jewish Scholars"; Danièle Iancu-Agou, "Les élites lettrées juives dans l'espace catalano-occitan (XVe siècle)," in *Perpignan: L'Histoire des Juifs dans la ville (XIIe–XXe siècles)* (Perpignan, 2003), 63–72; and her "La pratique du Latin chez les médecins juifs et néophytes de Provence médiévale (XIVe–XVIe siècles)," in *Latin-into-Hebrew: Texts and Studies*, vol. 1, ed. R. Fontaine and G. Freudenthal (Leiden, 2013), 85–102, 88; for the branch of the family in Girona, Tarrega, and Barcelona, see Carmel Ferragud Domingo, *Medicina i promoció social a la baixa edat mitjana: Corona d'Aragó, 1350–1410* (Madrid, 2005), 161.

100. Vatican ebr. 543: // נפשי בשמעה זאת חקירות ומה / לא מצאו מקום בקירות אהלי // קדוק ופריו מתקו לה אמרה / אקרא לבדו כל ימי עד בעלי // נקרא בשם לוי מחקר זה אשר / חלף עבודתו פני זה גואלי.

101. Solomon Bonafed, quoted in Kaminka, "*Shirim u-melitsot*," 40–42.

102. Kaminka, "*Shirim u-melitsot*," 39.

103. "Alas for the flock whose shepherd abandoned it, leaving bear and ravening wolf to watch over it. Inquire of Hasdai, when he goes up to you [pl.] on high, why has he abandoned his children?" Ibid.

104. Ibid., 40–42: מאור הדור וזר ענן סביבו / וראש בין הזמן נשא רדידיו // תמים דעים 40–42: ודעו לא ידעו / לבד לבו ולא נגלה לעובדיו // ועל לוח ספריו סוד אמוניו / ואם לא נודעו עם מעבדיו // רפאים עוררו מליו ומה טוב / לאיש יאמין אשר יכתוב בידיו // באפודיו נבואות לא קסמים / ואון ותרפים אין בסודיו.

105. Kaufmann, "La famille de Yehiel de Pise," 98.

106. MS Bodleian Or. 100, f. 100v. והוא השיב / והוא השיב / מדוע לא בא בן ישי.

CHAPTER 2

1. See for example the collected essays in Daniela Bleichmar, Paula De Vos, Kristin Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan, eds. *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500–1800* (Stanford, CA, 2009).

2. David Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, 2003), 97–100.
3. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Iberian Science in the Renaissance: Ignored How Much Longer?” *Perspectives on Science* 12 (2004): 86–124, 86. See also Beatriz Helena Domingues, “Spain and the Dawn of Modern Science,” *Metascience* 7 (1998): 298–312; Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin, TX, 2006).
4. Domingues, “Spain and the Dawn of Modern Science,” 301.
5. See works by Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge, UK, 1996), *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK, 2001), and *Science and Religion: From Aristotle to Copernicus, 400 BC–AD 1550* (Baltimore, 2006).
6. Guy Beaujouan, *La science en Espagne aux XIVE et XVe siècles* (Paris, 1967), 11.
7. José Chabás, “La actividad astronómica bajo el reinado de Pere el Cerimoniós,” *Mundo Científico* 10 (1990): 194–198.
8. John Scott Lucas, *Astrology and Numerology in Medieval and Early Modern Catalonia: The Tractat de prenostication de la vida natural dels hòmens* (Leiden, 2003), 19–20.
9. Beaujouan, *La science en Espagne*, 13.
10. José María López Piñero, *Ciencia y técnica en la sociedad española de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Barcelona, 1979), 62–69.
11. Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley, 1994), 1; Michael McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague: Practitioners and Their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285–1345* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 55–56; Eugenio Benedicto Gracia, “Los medicos judíos de Huesca, según los protocolos notariales del siglo XV,” *Sefarad* 68 (2008): 55–87.
12. MS Paris BN héb 1023. See Hermann Zotenberg, *Catalogues des manuscrits hébreux et samaritains de la Bibliothèque Impériale, manuscrits orientaux* (Paris, 1866), 184–185.
13. MS Paris BN héb 1023, ff. 70r–71v, 73v–74r, 74v–75v.
14. Ibid., f. 74v: מספר האפד מכתיבת זולתו.
15. Ibid., f. 70r. This would suggest that the student was copying down marginal comments found in the book of Gersonides’ tables that belonged to Bonjorn, and that the glosses were known to be in Bonjorn’s hand. We know Bonjorn’s own tables were strongly influenced by those of Gersonides; it is not surprising that such a manuscript should have been circulating in Perpignan in the years after Bonjorn’s death. Duran was acquainted with Bonjorn’s son, David. Was this son, too, a member of the study circle? I am deeply grateful to José Chabas for his aid in identifying this text.
16. Cornelius O’Boyle, *The Art of Medicine: Medical Teaching at the University of Paris, 1250–1400* (Leiden, 1998), 234.
17. MS Paris BN héb 1023, ff. 69v, 74r, 76r.
18. Since his name is prefaced with the abbreviation for “maestre,” commonly used in Hebrew texts to designate a physician, it is likely that he was

a doctor. It is *possible* that he may be identified with the *maestre* Bonjudas whose Hebrew name was Judah ben Solomon Nathan and whose medical treatise can be found in Jewish National and University Library MS heb. 28/2331, Oxford MS Opp. 181, and Oxford MS Mich. Add. 22. On the other hand, Bonjudas was not an uncommon name; he may equally have been the otherwise unknown individual named Bonjudas Gracian who appears in the tax roll for 1413 in Perpignan.

19. MS Paris BN héb 1023, f. 69v.

20. Ibid., f. 73r.

21. Ibid., ff. 74r; שצ"ם, ibid., f. 84r.

22. Ibid., ff. 75v, 74r, 76r.

23. Ibid., f. 73r.

24. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290. According to Emery, the three *responsa* thought to be sent to "Meir Crescas" should be dated prior to 1380, when the widow of a Jew of Peralada by the name of Mayr Crescas is known to have been living in Perpignan (Richard W. Emery, "New Light on Profayt Duran 'The Efodi,'" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58 [1968]: 328–337, 331). But Meir Crescas of Peralada cannot be the same individual as this Meir Crescas, because in this manuscript he comments on the eulogy by Duran, which in turn is dated to 1393 (f. 9r.). It seems likely that there were a father and son of the same name, uncommon but not unheard of: Meir Crescas of Peralada (d. 1380) living in Perpignan was the father of this man, Meir Crescas Qalonimos (d. after 1437), the student of Duran. The latter's own son, Crescas Meir, traveled to Italy, settled in Bitonto, and exchanged the letters with Lippomano from the early 1420s discussed in the Introduction. See Giulio Busi and Saverio Campanini, "Marco Lippomano and Crescas Meir: A Humanistic Dispute in Hebrew," in *Una Manna Buona per Mantova: Man Tov le-Man Tovah*, ed. M. Perani (Mantua, 2004), 169–202, 177–178, note 53.

25. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290, f. 22v.: אמר הכותב לא ראיתי להעתיק וזה הסדר מקונדורס אחד החברים בשמענו דברי החכם לפעמים ובעתים רחוקות וזה יותר מפירו' זה הסדר מקונדורס אחד החברים בשמענו דברי החכם ולדעת החכם ולא התברר לי אמנם בקושי ורוב העמל מצורף כי במה שנשאר לא הייתי בטוח מסכים לדעת החכם ולא התברר לי יוצא מפיו' ואעבור על מה שהשיגתי ממנו בסדר אמור אל הכהנים' עם יתר החברים הנאמנים.

26. Ruth Glasner, "Levi ben Gershon and the Study of Ibn Rushd in the Fourteenth Century," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 86 (1995): 51–90, 68.

27. Ibid., 76.

28. Translated in Frank Talmage, "Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch," *Medieval Studies* 47 (1985): 379–415, 383.

29. Dov Schwartz, "Toward Research into Philosophical Circles in Pre-Expulsion Spain and Provence," *Trumah* 12 (2002): 113–132, 113–116.

30. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290, f. 23v.: אמר הכותב זה מה שנמסר לנו בזה הדרוש בחשאי ובצנעה.

31. See Eleazar Gutwirth, "Hebrew Letters, Hispanic Mail: Communication Among Fourteenth-Century Aragon Jewry," in *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: The Pre-Modern World*, ed. S. Menache (Leiden, 1996), 257–282.

32. José Chabás, "The Astronomical Tables of Jacob ben David Bonjorn," *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 42 (1991): 279–314, 282.

33. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place*, 97.
34. Gabriel Llompart and Jaume Riera i Sans, "Jafudà Cresques i Samuel Corcós: Més documents sobre els jueus pintors de cartes de navegar (Mallorca, s. XIV)," *Bolletí de la Societat Arqueològica Lul·liana* 40 (1984): 341–350.
35. See Michael A. Ryan, *A Kingdom of Stargazers: Astrology and Authority in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Ithaca, 2011).
36. A. I. Sabra, "Situating Arabic Science: Locality Versus Essence," *Isis* 87 (1996): 654–670, 662.
37. David C. Goodman, "The Scientific Revolution in Spain and Portugal," in *The Scientific Revolution in National Context*, ed. R. Porter and M. Teich (Cambridge, UK, 1992), 158–177, 158; see also his "Iberian Science: Navigation, Empire and Counter-Reformation," in *The Rise of Scientific Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. D. C. Goodman and C. A. Russell (London, 1991), 117–144; also see Domingues, "Spain and the Dawn of Modern Science," 301.
38. Gad Freudenthal, "Arav and Edom as Cultural Resources for Medieval Judaism: Contrasting Attitudes Toward Arabic and Latin Learning in the Midi and in Italy," in *Late Medieval Jewish Identities: Iberia and Beyond*, ed. C. Caballero-Navas and E. Alfonso (New York, 2010), 123–156, and his "Arabic and Latin Cultures as Resources for the Hebrew Translation Movement: Comparative Considerations, Both Quantitative and Qualitative," in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 74–105; see also Mauro Zonta, *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century: A History and Source Book* (Dordrecht, 2006).
39. Tony Lévy, "Le chapitre I, 73 du Guide des Égarés et la tradition mathématique hébraïque au Moyen Âge: Un commentaire inédit de Salomon b. Isaac," *Revue des études juives* 148 (1989): 307–336, 312.
40. Ibid.
41. Gad Freudenthal, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Transmission of the Mathematical Tract 'On Two Asymptotic Lines' in the Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew Medieval Traditions," *Vivarium* 26 (1988): 113–140.
42. MS Parma 2112, ff. 53v–55v. Tony Lévy, "Le chapitre I," 310–311, and "L'étude des sections coniques dans la tradition médiévale hébraïque: Ses relations avec les traditions arabe et latine," *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences* 42 (1989): 193–239, 222–225. See also José Chabás, "L'influence de l'astronomie de Levi ben Gershom sur Jacob ben David Bonjorn," in *Studies on Gersonides: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Philosopher*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Leiden, 1992), 47–54, 47, note 2.
43. John E. Murdoch, "From Social to Intellectual Factors: An Aspect of the Unitary Character of Late Medieval Learning," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. Emory (Dordrecht, 1975), 271–348, 272.
44. John E. Murdoch, "The Analytic Character of Late Medieval Learning: Natural Philosophy Without Nature," in *Approaches to Nature in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. D. Roberts (Binghamton, NY, 1982), 171–213; see also Joan Cadden, "Charles V, Nicole Oresme, and Christine de Pizan: Unities

and Uses of Knowledge in Fourteenth-Century France,” in *Texts and Contexts in Ancient and Medieval Science*, ed. E. Sylla and M. McVaugh (Leiden, 1997), 208–244; and Guy Beaujouan, “Motives and Opportunities for Science in the Medieval Universities,” in *Scientific Change: Historical Studies in the Intellectual, Social, and Technical Conditions for Scientific Discovery and Technical Invention from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. A. C. Crombie (New York, 1963), 219–236.

45. See Gutwirth, “Hebrew Letters, Hispanic Mail.”

46. See Gad Freudenthal, “Science in the Medieval Jewish Culture of Southern France,” *History of Science* 33 (1995): 23–58, and his “Les sciences dans les communautés juives médiévales de Provence: Leur appropriation, leur rôle,” *Revue des études juives* 152 (1993): 29–136.

CHAPTER 3

1. Letter of R. Joseph Solomon of Candia, in *Melo Chofnajim*, ed. A. Geiger (Berlin, 1840), 18.

2. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), epistle dedicatory, 3.

3. Duran on *Guide* in *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim*, trans. S. ibn Tibbon (Jerusalem, 1960), Petiḥa, 3a: הנה מאז באת אלי וכוונת מקצת הארץ לקרות לפני.

4. Duran on *Guide*, Petiḥa, 3a, א and ב.

5. Duran on *Guide* I.36 ṛ, see also *Guide* II. 19, א.

6. Duran on *Guide* I.73, 117b–118a, 123a–b.

7. Letter of R. Joseph Solomon of Candia, in *Melo Chofnajim*, 18.

8. Duran cites him by name only on I.73, 116b, 119b, and II.48, 97b.

9. Maurice Hayoun, *Moshe Narboni* (Tübingen, 1986), 89–91. See also Duran’s comment on *Guide* II.45, 5a, where he cites approvingly the response of “R. Vidal” to the question of why Abraham was only granted a vision of three “men” whereas Lot, clearly a lesser figure, was given a vision of angels. He cites him by name also on II.42, 90b, and III.29, 43a.

10. Duran on *Guide* I.70, 106b, ב; II.30, 62b, ג; III.1, 2a, א; III.2, 5a, ה and י; III.47, 60a, ה.

11. He also cites by name: Aristotle’s *De Caelo* (I.5, 20a–b; II.30, 59a), his *Meteorology* (II.30, 59a), and the *Physics* (III.13, 17b); ibn Janah’s *Book of Roots* (I.8, 25b; I.10, 27a); Nissim of Girona (I.69, 103a; I.72, 112a); Abraham Caslari (I.59, 88b; I.72, 111a); al-Farabi (I.73, 122a; I.74, 129a); ibn Rushd (I.74, 129a; II.intro, 9a; II.1, 4b; II.29, 56b); al-Ghazali’s *Maqāṣid* (I.71, 108a; II.intro, 1b, 5b, 7b, 9a; II.29, 56b); ibn Sina (II.intro, 9a); ibn Ezra (II.29, 56b); and Kimḥi (II.30, 62b).

12. See the studies by Shalom Rosenberg, Sara Klein-Braslavy, and, in particular, Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Secrets of the *Guide* to the Perplexed Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 159–207, “The Secrets of Maimonides Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries,” in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 159–207, and “Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the *Guide* of the

Perplexed,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 6 (1981): 87–123. See also Maurice Hayoun, *L'exégèse philosophique dans le judaïsme médiéval* (Tübingen, 1992); and Jacob I. Dienstag, “The *Moreh Nebukhim* in Pre-Expulsion Spanish Thought and Scholarship: An Historical Survey,” *Daat* 31 (1993): xxi–xlv.

13. Duran on *Guide*, Petiḥa, 3b.

14. Duran on *Guide* II.34, 55a. For Abravanel's response, see Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent and Dialogue* (Albany, 2001), 74.

15. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), II.29, 347.

16. Ravitzky, “Secrets of the *Guide to the Perplexed*,” 184.

17. *Ibid.*, 352, 59b.

18. Duran on *Guide* II.30, 59b–60a.

19. On the philosophical exegesis of Genesis, see articles by Seymour Feldman, especially “‘In the Beginning God Created the Heavens’: Philoponus’ *De Opificio Mundi* and Rabbinic Exegesis,” in *Torah et science: Perspectives historiques et théoriques*, ed. G. Freudenthal, J.-P. Rothschild, and G. Dahan (Paris, 2001), 37–69. See also Isaak Heinemann, “Scientific Allegorization During the Jewish Middle Ages,” in *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, ed. A. Jospe (Detroit, 1981), 247–269; Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Maimonides' Interpretation of the Story of Creation* (Hebrew), (2nd ed. Jerusalem, 1987), and her *Maimonides' Interpretation of the Adam Stories in Genesis: A Study in Maimonides' Anthropology* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1986).

20. “[Maimonides] means [that the text] hints that the woman, spoken of in *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, is first matter. And ‘the man’ hints at form and since there ‘the man’ refers to form, it is said that God may He be blessed is ‘a man of war’ since He is the form of all existent things and all of them are made one and combined in Him, and like Him.” Duran on *Guide* I.6, 23b.

21. Duran on *Guide* II.30, 61a.

22. Cf. Ravitsky, “Samuel Ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” 103.

23. See Gad Freudenthal, “Maimonides on the Scope of Metaphysics Alias *Ma'aseh Merkavah*: The Evolution of His Views,” in *Maimónides y su época*, ed. C. del Valle, S. García-Jalón, and J. P. Monferrer (Madrid, 2007), 221–230; Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 250–305. Also see Daniel Davies, *Method and Metaphysics in Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (Oxford, 2011), 106–133.

24. Duran on *Guide* III.2, 3a. Maimonides distinguishes between the transparent orbs (*galgalim*) that carry the stars and planets and four spheres (*kadurim*) that, as Duran explains, are “the *kadur* of the fixed stars and the *kadur* of the five wandering stars and the *kadur* of the sun and the *kadur* of the moon.”

25. Duran on *Guide* III.2, 3a–5a.

26. Duran on *Guide* II.10, 7, 26a.

27. Gad Freudenthal, “Cosmology: The Heavenly Bodies,” in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. S. Nadler and T. M. Rudavsky (Cambridge, UK, 2009), 302–361, 345–346.

28. See Duran on *Guide* II.32, 67b. Duran notes the “radical” interpretation that Maimonides wishes to hide the fact that his opinion on prophecy is identical with that of Aristotle. Duran also adduces the seventh cause in his reading of *Guide* II.1, 15a.

29. *Guide* I.intro., 18.

30. Duran on *Guide* Petiḥa, 10b.

31. In the episode described in Exodus, Moses then builds a memorial altar and interprets the name he gives it as meaning “for my hand upon the throne of the Lord [*ki yad al kes yah*], the Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages,” namely, as referring to an oath made by God. Why precisely Maimonides thinks the phrase “throne of God” in this verse cannot refer to the heavens spurs a lengthy note from Duran pointing out, among other things, that some claim that “whoever makes an oath swears by something superior to him, or at least [swears] by himself.” (Duran may be referring to ibn Kaspi here, who does make this claim. Joseph ibn Kaspi, *Maskiyyot Kesef*, ed. S. Werblumer (Frankfurt, 1848), 26.) Duran asserts that the real problem is that according to the “secrets” of oaths, they must be sworn on something “simple” and thus an oath made on anything other than God is no oath at all. The answer he seems to like is the rabbinic one that the term “*kes yah*,” usually read as “throne of God,” is actually a proper name for God. (Duran also devotes a long discussion here to the rejection of divine attributes.)

32. *Guide* I.9, 35.

33. Duran on *Guide* I.9, 27a.

34. *Guide* II.26, 330.

35. *Ibid.*, 331.

36. Duran on *Guide* II.24, 52a.

37. Ibn Kaspi, *Maskiyyot Kesef*, 27.

38. *Ibid.* “And if you claim against me, that here [I.9] Maimonides contradicts what he said in II.26, indeed, everlastingness is written here [I.9] regarding ‘Thou, O Lord, etc.’ and that chapter 27 follows from this [which is the discussion regarding the possible everlastingness of the world, where Maimonides also mentions the ‘throne of glory’], and necessarily there [II.26] it is [written] regarding the [celestial] orb, since he says there that it is a created thing, and also explains in chapter I.70 that the ‘throne of glory’ is ‘*aravot* which is the [celestial] orb . . . the answer is that the *Guide* already pointed out in his introduction that the contradictions found in his book are either of the fifth or seventh cause.”

39. Duran on *Guide* I.9, 27a.

40. Cf. Maimonides’ remark “From the point of view of the Law, there is no harm in this in any respect whatever.” *Guide* II.27, 333.

41. Freudenthal, “Cosmology: The Heavenly Bodies,” 348.

42. Duran on *Guide* I.68, 101a, 1: he seems to prefer Gersonides’ epistemology to that of Maimonides; on *Guide* III.20, 3a, 7: he objects to

Maimonides' list of how human knowledge is different from divine knowledge, and refers his reader to *The Wars of the Lord* ("and in general in all these matters one should investigate in the *Wars of the Lord* of R. Levi ben Gershom z"l"); on III.22, 33a, 1: he compares one element of Gersonides' interpretation of the story of Job; on III.23, 35b, 2: he makes reference again to Gersonides on Job, in relation to divine providence.

43. This issue has spawned an impressive literature. See Tzvi Langermann, "The True Perplexity: *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Part II, Chapter 24," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. J. L. Kraemer (London, 1996), 159–174; the articles in *Aleph* 8 (2008), in particular Warren Z. Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and Guide 2.24," 213–235; Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky and J. M. Harris, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 82–109; Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. K. Seeskin (New York, 2005), 105–133, and his "Maimonides on the Growth of Knowledge and the Limitations of the Intellect," in *Maimonide: Philosophie et Savant* (1138–1204), ed. T. Lévy and R. Rashed (Leuven, 2004), 143–191; Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1987), 60–91; Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1995): 49–103.

44. Duran on *Guide* II.24, 50a–b, 7.

45. See José Luis Mancha and Gad Freudenthal, "Levi ben Gershom's Criticism of Ptolemy's Astronomy," *Aleph* 5 (2005): 35–167.

46. Duran on *Guide* II.24, 50b, 2.

47. See the bibliography in Chapter 5, note 17.

48. Duran on *Guide* I.54, 80a.

49. Duran on *Guide* I.16; 33b. Cf. Bahya ibn Pakuda, "The traces of the Creator's wisdom are equally manifest in the smallest and the most massive of the creatures, all of them witnesses to their common origin, the One and Omniscient Creator." *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. M. Mansoor (London, 1973), 122.

50. See in particular, Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), *Commentary on Song of Songs*, trans. M. Kellner (New Haven, CT, 1998), especially Gersonides' introduction.

51. *Guide* III.14, 456.

52. *Ibid.*, 457.

53. Duran on *Guide* III.14, 20a.

CHAPTER 4

1. Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 104.

2. See Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Philosophy and Kabbalah: 1200–1600," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. D. H. Frank and O. Leaman (Cambridge, UK, 2003), 218–257.

3. Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Some Astrological Themes in the Thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra," in *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*, ed. I. Twersky and J. M. Harris (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 28–85, 31.

4. Dov Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1996). This circle exhibits a far more open attraction to astrology than does Duran. While Duran shows some traces of Neoplatonic, astral-magic, and astrological influence, these are incorporated into a system still cast primarily in Maimonidean terms.

5. Dov Schwartz, *Astrology and Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Hebrew) (Ramat-Gan, 1999), 237–262; Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893), 403–404.

6. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina 2290, 4r.

7. For the manuscripts, see the Appendix.

8. "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*," in *Ma'aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 185–187.

9. MS Munich 214, ff. 1r–26v; Paris BNF héb 1016, ff. 19v–43r, JNUL hebr. 8 151. Published as *Sefer ha-tamar: das Buch von der Palme des Abu Aflah aus Syracus*, ed. and trans. G. Scholem (Jerusalem, 1926). See also Chapter 12, below.

10. MS Parma Biblioteca Palatina. 2290, f. 9r.

11. "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*," 186.

12. See Kalman J. Bland, *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni* (New York, 1982).

13. "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*," 186.

14. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963) II.37, 373–375.

15. An anonymous text translated into Hebrew from Arabic and attributed in the manuscripts to either al-Ghazali or Ibn Rushd. See Binyamin Abrahamov, "The Sources of the Book *Moznei ha-'Iyyunim*" (Hebrew), *Daat* 34 (1995): 83–86; Y. Tzvi Langermann, "A Judaeo-Arab Poem Attributed to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali," *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebráicos*, Sección de Hebreo 52 (2003): 183–200, 190–191.

16. "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*," 186. See also Duran in *Ma'aseh Efod*: "And since that which I think also of the matter is even more elevated than this and this is that when he apprehends, the *hyle* of the world answers . . . to the soul of the apprehender; he apprehends it for that which he desires, either something according to the natural order like bringing down rain and healing the sick and things like that or for something impossible according to nature, like the turning of the staff into a snake and the stopping of the sun at Gibeon; these things are called signs and wonders and this subject cannot be known except by way of prophecy; apprehending it is impossible by way of logical reasoning." *Ma'aseh Efod*, 90–91.

17. *Sefer Adam ha-Rishon* may be a reference to the book of Adam mentioned in the Talmud Bava Metzia 85b, which seems to recount the future generations of the sages. See Joseph E. David, "'As It Was Written in the Book of Adam': Apocalyptic and Mythical Perception of Historical Time in Early Medieval Jewish Thought" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 74 (2005): 577–602.

18. "On a Phrase from *Sefer ha-Tamar*," 186.

19. *Guide* II.32, 361.

20. *Ibid.*

21. "On Immortality and Eternal Damnation," in *Ma'aseh Efod*, 184–185.

22. See Steven Harvey, "Why Did Fourteenth-Century Jews Turn to Alghazali's Account of Natural Science?," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 91 (2001): 359–376.

23. "On Immortality and Eternal Damnation," 184.

24. Gitit Holzman, *The Theory of the Intellect and Soul in the Thought of Rabbi Moshe Narboni: Based on His Commentaries on the Writings of Ibn Rushd, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Bajja and al-Ghazali* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1996), 303.

25. José María Millás-Vallicrosa, "Aspectos filosóficos de la polemica judaica en tiempos de Hasday Crescas," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday, English Section* (Jerusalem, 1965), 561–575; see also Dov Schwartz, "Toward Research into Philosophical Circles in Pre-Expulsion Spain and Provence," *Trumah* 12 (2002): 113–132, 120.

26. See Warren Zev Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam, 1998).

27. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3.6; Duran addresses himself only to the first three. See Menachem Marc Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Oxford, 1986).

28. "On Immortality and Eternal Damnation," 185.

29. Cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3.7.

30. "On Immortality and Eternal Damnation," 185.

31. Maimonides describes three types of *apikorsim*: "One who says that there is no Prophecy at all and that there is no knowledge given by God to men; one who refutes the Prophecy of Moses; and one who says that God doesn't know the actions of men." *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3. See also the other sources in Maimonides listed in Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 18. Duran's formulation is again a rewording of Maimonides', with the addition of the etymological derivation and the citation of Galen. See, however, Maimonides, *Guide* II.13, 285, and *Guide* III.17, 464, where "Epicurus" is associated with a lack of belief in providence.

32. "On Immortality and Eternal Damnation," 185.

33. Cf. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3.8.

34. Duran stops just before the apostates who are next on Maimonides' list: "There are two types of *meshumadim*: one who is an apostate with respect to just one commandment; and one who is an apostate with respect to the entire Torah. . . . One who is an apostate with respect to the entire Torah is one who changes to the ways of the gentiles, when they decree persecution,

and cleaves to them, and says, ‘*How unjust is my reward for clinging to Israel, who are lowly and pursued!*’” *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 3.9. Perhaps one should not read too much into this. He is dealing only with those levels of heresy that can be accommodated within the definition of a Jew, while a *meshumad* is presumably beyond engaging in heresy.

35. Hasdai Crescas, *Or ha-Shem*, ed. S. Fisher (Jerusalem, 1990), 9.

36. Crescas, preface to *Or ha-Shem*, quoted by Kellner in *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 113.

37. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 184–185. And at the very end of the *teshuvah*, Duran reiterates his position: “it is not proper that he be called a heretic who holds to the contradiction of our hypothesis, for it is indeed possible that the Writings and the books of the sages be explained in a way that agrees with their opinion.”

38. Crescas, preface to *Or ha-Shem*, quoted by Kellner in *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 113.

39. See Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Gan Eden et Gehinnom dans le système de Hasdai Crescas,” in *Hommage à George Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Leuven, 1980), 263–278.

40. Crescas, *Or ha-Shem*, III.A. 2–3.

41. For a discussion of these rules, see Irene Zwiep, “Jewish Scholarship and Christian Tradition in Late-Medieval Catalonia: Profiat Duran on the Art of Memory,” in *Hebrew Scholarship and the Medieval World*, ed. N. de Lange (Cambridge, UK, 2001), 224–238.

42. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 18.

43. Crescas, *Or ha-Shem*, introduction, 3–4.

44. On the contacts between Crescas and Duran, see Daniel J. Lasker’s introduction to Hasdai Crescas, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles by Hasdai Crescas*, ed. D. J. Lasker (Albany, 1992).

45. The way Duran describes the principles of Talmud study, presumably from his own experience, is congruent with the principles promulgated by both Crescas and R. Nissim. See Yoel Marciano, “From Aragon to Castile: The Origins of Sephardi Talmudic Speculation in Fifteenth-Century Spain” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 77 (2009): 573–600, 587–591.

46. *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 3.

47. *Ibid.*, 2.

48. It appears both in *Kelimat ha-goyim* and the *Eulogy* and also in the *Arba’ah Turim*, by a student of Crescas, in the early 1380s. Daniel J. Lasker, “Original Sin and Its Atonement According to Hasdai Crescas” (Hebrew), *Daat* 20 (1988): 127–135, 129, note 10.

49. Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 82.

50. See Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900* (Cambridge, UK, 2008), 55–94.

51. *Eulogy*, in *Ma’aseh Efod*, 196.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. “On the Hebdomad,” in *Ma’aseh Efod*, 181–184, 183.

56. Ibid., 183.

57. *Guide* I.72, 188.

58. Ibid., 188. Duran glosses this line: “he means, this is the power that governs existence in the world as a whole *and it connects its portions one with the other* and there is no doubt that this is the power that comes from Him may He be exalted; *one can speculate whether the power comes from Him may He be exalted through the intermediary* of the sphere of Aravot, but it is all His and He necessarily moves it; or it is said that this power comes from Him may He be exalted without the intermediary of a sphere, and in this interpretation, the Lord does not move the sphere of Aravot.” Duran on the *Guide* I.72, 112b–113a, 2.

59. Bahya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. M. Mansoor (London, 1973), 142.

60. “On the Hebdomad,” 183.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. See Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Me’orot*, in *Abraham Ibn Ezra on Elections, Interrogations, and Medical Astrology*, ed. and trans. S. Sela (Leiden, 2011), 451–484, 455: “Because the Moon’s light is similar to a newborn, who grows stronger and then weaker, it signifies everything and the beginning of every thought, act, and birth.”

64. See the notes by Shlomo Sela in *Abraham Ibn Ezra on Elections*, 120, 221, 231–232.

65. “On the Hebdomad,” 183.

66. Ibid.

67. See *Ma’aseh Efod*, chapter 15.

CHAPTER 5

1. Levi ben Gerson [Gersonides], *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, ed. and trans. M. Kellner (New Haven, CT, 1998), 56. See *Ma’aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 15: “Do not think that it is my intention to seal the gate of investigation completely to the other well-known sciences for what is in them that is true in itself and demonstrably proven, as is the case with mathematics.”

2. Levi ben Gerson [Gersonides], *The Astronomy of Levi ben Gerson (1288–1344): A Critical Edition of Chapters 1–20 with Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. B. Goldstein (New York, 1985), 24.

3. Ibid., 25.

4. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mora ve-Sod Torah: The Foundation of Piety and the Secret of the Torah*, ed. J. Cohen and U. Simon (Ramat-Gan, 2002), 34.

5. Introduction to *Heshev ha-Efod*, printed in *Ma’aseh Efod*, German section, 43.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Duran on *Guide* I.46, in Maimonides, *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim*, trans. S. ibn Tibbon (Jerusalem, 1960), 64b.

10. See Gad Freudenthal, "Les sciences dans les communautés juives médiévales de Provence: Leur appropriation, leur rôle," *Revue des études juives* 152 (1993): 29–136, "Science in the Medieval Jewish Culture of Southern France," *History of Science* 33 (1995): 23–58, "Levi ben Gershom as a Scientist: Physics, Astrology and Eschatology," *Proc. 10th World Congress of J. Stud.*, C:I. (1990): 65–72, and "Sauver son âme ou sauver les phénomènes: Soteriologie, épistémologie et astronomie chez Gersonide," in *Studies on Gersonides: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist* (Leiden, 1992), 317–354. See Steven Harvey, "Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine Which Philosophers Would Be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1992): 51–70.

11. See Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Almagest*, trans. G. J. Toomer (London, 1984); and Mauro Zonta, "La tradizione ebraica dell 'Almagesto' di Tolomeo," *Henoch* 15 (1993): 325–350.

12. Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Hebrew Astronomy: Deep Soundings from a Rich Tradition," in *Astronomy Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Astronomy*, ed. H. Selin (Dordrecht, 2000), 555–584, 567. See MS Paris BNF héb 1023, an anonymous commentary on al-Farghānī, with a comment by the student of Duran in the margin of one of the pages, beginning, "As I heard from the Efod" (f. 39r).

13. See José Chabás and Bernard R. Goldstein, *A Survey of European Astronomical Tables in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012).

14. A. I. Sabra, "The Andalusian Revolt against Ptolemaic Astronomy: Averroes and al-Bitruji," in *Transformation and Tradition in the Sciences: Essays in Honor of I. Bernard Cohen*, ed. E. Mendelsohn (Cambridge, UK, 1984), 133–153.

15. See Tzvi Langermann, "The True Perplexity: *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Part II, Chapter 24," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. J. L. Kraemer (London, 1996), 159–174; the articles in *Aleph* 8 (2008), in particular Warren Z. Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and Guide 2.24," 213–235; Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature I*, ed. I. Twersky and J. M. Harris, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 82–109; Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. K. Seeskin (New York, 2005), 105–133, and his "Maimonides on the Growth of Knowledge and the Limitations of the Intellect," in *Maimonide: Philosophe et Savant (1138–1204)*, ed. T. Lévy and R. Rashed (Leuven, 2004), 143–191; Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur moderne Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1987), 60–91; Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1995): 49–103.

16. Juliane Lay, "L'Abrégé de l'Almageste: Un inédit d'Averroès en version hébraïque," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 6 (1996): 23–61, 32. The Arabic

original of the Abbreviation having been lost and never translated into Latin, the Hebrew version, called the *Kitzur Almagisti*, done between 1231 and 1235 by Jacob Anatoli (c. 1194–1256), is the only version extant.

17. See Lay, “*L’Abrégé de l’Almageste*,” 28.

18. Paris BNF héb. 1026, ff. 11–29r.

19. See Julio Samsó, “Ibn al-Haytham and Jābir b. Aflah’s Criticism of Ptolemy’s Determination of the Parameters of Mercury,” *Subayl* 2 (2001): 199–225; Richard P. Lorch, “The Astronomy of Jābir ibn Aflah,” *Centaurus* 19 (1979): 85–107; George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam* (New York, 1995), 24.

20. MS Paris BNF héb 1026, ff. 29r–31r.

21. José Bellver Martínez, “El Lugar del Islah al-Mayisti de Yabir b. Aflah en la llamada ‘rebelión andalusí contra la astronomía ptolemaica,’” *Al-Qantara* 30 (2009): 83–136.

22. Robert G. Morrison, “The Solar Model in Joseph Ibn Joseph Ibn Naḥmias’ ‘Light of the World,’” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005): 57–108.

23. This principle was enunciated in similar terms both by Maimonides (*Guide* I.71, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines [Chicago, 1963], 179, *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim*, 109a), in the name of Themistius, the המציאות הדעות נמשכת אחר הדעות אבל הדעות האמתיות נמשכות אחר המציאות (Chabás and Goldstein, *Survey of European Astronomical Tables*, 24). Duran invokes this principle in *Ma’aseh Efod*, 13.

24. Oxford Bodleian Library MS Canonici Misc. 334, f. 100v. הגיע השמים החדשים אשר נטו ידי החכם המעלה ר' יוסף נ' נחמיש אשר ראוי שישבה על זריזוהו וחריצתו והשתדלו מה שנכספו נפשות החשובים לידיעתו עם שלא עזרהו המציאות להשלים כונתו וכבר הרגיש בזה ההגבר על המוחשו' ירצה להמשיך המציאות אחר הידיעות ועשה פרק אחד לבאר כי חלוק שזור קטר הירח אצל ההבטה לא יחייב בהכרח חלוק מרחק הירח מהארץ אמר שם כי הוא יניח שמרכז הירח במרחק ג' תמיד ממרכז הארץ וזה יסתרהו החוש אצל המביט' כלם אשר היו מימי קדם כי הורגש אצלם במה שאין ספק בו. See Gad Freudenthal, “The Distinction Between Two R. Joseph b. Joseph Naḥmias—the Commentator and the Astrologer” (Hebrew), *Qiryat Sefer* 62 (1988–1999): 917–919.

25. *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. E. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 73–84, 81. Gutwirth reads this line as an allusion to Pablo’s conversion, his “radical mutations.” Eleazar Gutwirth, “Religion and Social Criticism in Late Medieval Rousillon: An Aspect of Profayt Duran’s Activities,” *Michael* 12 (1991): 135–156, 144. But the terminology is perhaps too standard to evoke much more than it does; the “variation of the poles” seems to be an allusion to this particular method of modeling planetary motions.

26. See the “Reasons for the Tables of the Efod” in MS Rome Casanatense 3093.

CHAPTER 6

1. “On the Hebdomad,” published in *Ma’aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 181–184.

2. It was also central to the kabbalists because of its appearance in the numerical progression of three, seven, twelve, a system that had its origin in *Sefer Yetzirah* and exercised a strong and persistent influence on kabbalistic literature. See, for example, Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla, *Sefer Ginnat Egoz* (Jerusalem, 1989); or Moses Nahmanides, “Sermon for a Wedding,” in *Writings and Discourses*, 2 vols., ed. C. B. Chavel (New York, 1978).

3. This work appears in a unique extant manuscript: MS Munich 290, ff. 49r–62r. See Moritz Steinschneider, “Das Königsbuch des Kalonymos,” in *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben*, vol. 8 (Breslau, 1870), 118–122; Tony Lévy, “L’histoire des nombres amiables: Le témoignage des textes hébreux médiévaux,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 6 (1996): 63–87, 76–87. The chapter on the number four was translated by Tzvi Langermann in “Studies in Medieval Hebrew Pythagoreanism: Translations and Notes to Nicomachus: Arithmological Texts,” *Micrologus* 9 (2001): 233–236.

4. “On the Hebdomad,” 181.

5. Ibid. Compare: Abraham Ibn Ezra, “*Sefer ha-ehad*,” in *Yalqut Abraham ibn Ezra*, ed. I. Levin (New York, 1985), 402: “Seven is composed of the first number that is not even and the second that is even, and similarly it is composed of the first even number with the second that is not even. And because of this the sages of arithmetic call it perfect.” השבעה מחבר מתחלת מספר שאיננו זוג עם שני זוג, וככה הוא מחבר מתחלת זוג עם שני שאיננו זוג. ובעבור זה קראוהו חכמי התורה חשבון שלם. *Sefer melakhim*: “Seven: it is a prime number which is in the first level and the prime numbers in the level are two, three, five, seven. And the number seven is composed of the first of the evens with the second of the odds and the first of the odds with the second of the evens, and for this the early sages called it an inclusive number.” והשבעה הוא מספר ראשון שבמדרגה הראשונה. וזהו שם מספרים הראשונים שבמדרגה הם ב' ג' ד' ה' ו' ומספר זה מורכב מתחלת הזוגות עם שני לנפרדים ומתחלת הנפרדים עם שני לזוגות ולזה קראוהו קדמוני החכמים מספר כולל MS Munich 290, f. 54r.

6. Porphyry, *Biography of Pythagoras*, 52, quoted in Vincent F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (New York, 1938), 45. However, the word was applied by him to the number ten, not the number seven. See also the arithmetical writings of the Ikhwān al-Safā', which give the “properties” of numbers: “The property of six is that it is the first complete number, while the property of seven is that it is the first perfect number.” From the epistle on arithmetic translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his *Science and Civilization in Islam*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 155.

7. “On the Hebdomad,” 181. Again there is another parallel in ibn Ezra, who notes: “[Seven] is like five, for the sum of the square of one and the square of the first even number [two] and the square of the first odd number [three] is the double of seven, which is fourteen.” *Sefer ha-ehad*, in *Yalqut Abraham ibn Ezra*, 402. Fourteen is like five, because $1 + 4 = 5$. But again, the closer

parallel is to be found in *Sefer melakhim*: “It is the middle [number] among the four composite numbers, two before it and two after it, before it are four, six and after it are eight, nine; and if you double seven it is fourteen, which is composed of the squares of one, two, three, which constitute the nature of number, as was explained above.” MS Munich 290, f. 54r.

8. “On the Hebdomad,” 181. This second reason appears also in Qalonymos who, when describing the properties of the number three, notes that “it completes all the nature of number and that is, that in it is one and also the two species of multiplicity, the even and the odd.” MS Munich 290, f. 50v.

9. Euclid, *The Thirteen Books of the Elements*, trans. T. L. Heath, vol. 2 (New York, 1956), VII, def. 22, 278.

10. See, for example, Abraham bar Hiyya, *La obra enciclopédica Yesode ha-tebuna u-migdal ha-emunah de R. Abraham bar Hiyya ha-Bargeloni*, ed. and trans. J. M. Millás-Vallicrosa (Madrid, 1952), 15.

11. Euclid’s seventeenth definition—viz.: “And, when three numbers having multiplied one another make some number, the number so produced is called *solid*, and its *sides* are the numbers which have multiplied one another.” Euclid, *Thirteen Books of the Elements*, VII. 17. In Euclid’s conception, a number is called “solid” if, when represented by an equal number of dots, those dots can be arranged into a cube-like figure of three dimensions, with each side of the cube representing one of the divisors. Therefore, seven can in no way be called a solid number, being a prime number.

12. Abraham bar Judah made his own translation of the *Book of Elements* in 1375. Shalom Rosenberg, “The *Arba’ah Turim* of Rabbi Abraham bar Judah, Disciple of Don Hasdai Crescas” (Hebrew), *JSJT* 3 (1983–1984), 525–621, 526. This work was translated by Moses ibn Tibbon as well in 1270 in Provence, given a foreword by Jacob ben Makhir ibn Tibbon (Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* [Berlin, 1893], 504), and glossed by Gersonides. There are over thirty surviving manuscripts, and four different Hebrew versions, the most commonly available being that of ibn Tibbon. See Tony Lévy, “Gersonide, commentateur d’Euclide: Traduction annotée de ses gloses sur *les Éléments*,” in *Studies on Gersonides, a Fourteenth Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Leiden, 1992), 83–147.

13. Aristotle notes that “body is the only complete/perfect magnitude, since it is the only one which is defined by extension in three directions, that is, which is an ‘all.’” Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, ed. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA, 1939), 7. Ibn Rushd’s Middle Commentary on this work was translated by Solomon ibn Ayyub in 1259 and commented on by Gersonides between 1321 and 1324. See Ruth Glasner, “Levi ben Gershom and the Study of Ibn Rushd in the Fourteenth Century,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 86 (1995): 51–90. This reference would actually seem to contradict Duran’s interpretation, in that Aristotle here associates perfection with three dimensions and Duran associates it specifically with *not* having three dimensions (divisors) and thus being abstracted [i.e., “prime” (*muf-sha’*)] from corporeality.

14. “On the Hebdomad,” 181.

15. Ibid.

16. שבעה מזבחות - יש סודות עמוקים לא יבינום כי אם מתי מספר ושביעי בימים ובחדשים ובשנים ושבעה כבשי העולה ושבע הזאות גם אמר השם לאיוב קחו לכם שבעה פרים ושבעה אילים 23:1, in *Perushei HaTorah L'Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra* (Jerusalem, 1976).

17. Ibid., 182.

18. Ibid.

19. MS Munich 290, ff. 54r–54v.

20. “On the Hebdomad,” 182.

21. Ibid.

22. Ptolemy acknowledged only four aspects, trine, quartile, sextile, and opposition. Conjunction (of planets) is another and being to the right or to the left.

23. Duran and *Sefer melakhim* both refer us here to Avicenna’s *Qanun*.

24. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), III.43, 571.

25. “On the Hebdomad,” 182. This is not the astronomer Jabir Ibn Aflah.

26. Ibid., 183.

27. Solomon Gandz, “Saadia Gaon as Mathematician,” in *Studies in Hebrew Astronomy and Mathematics* (New York, 1970), 481.

28. *Guide* I.72, 188.

29. Nicole Oresme, *Le livre du ciel et du monde*, ed. A. J. Denomy and A. D. Menut, trans. Menut (Madison, 1968), 51. Also see Edward Grant, “Nicole Oresme, Aristotle’s *On the Heavens*, and the Court of Charles V,” in *Texts and Contexts in Ancient and Medieval Science*, ed. J. E. Murdoch, E. D. Sylla, and M. R. McVaugh (Leiden, 1997), 187–207, 195.

30. Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, I.1, 5.

31. Oresme, *Le livre du ciel et du monde*, 55–57, 723.

32. MS Munich 290, f. 51r.

33. Ibid., f. 52r.

34. See Cyril Aslanoff, “La réflexion linguistique hébraïque dans l’horizon intellectuel de l’Occident médiéval: Essai de comparaison des traités de grammaire hébraïque et provençale dans la perspective de l’histoire des doctrines grammaticales,” *Revue des études juives* 155 (1996): 5–32.

35. Oresme, *Le livre du ciel et du monde*, 57.

36. Harry A. Wolfson, “The Veracity of Scriptures from Philo to Spinoza,” in *Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays* (New York, 1965), 223–237, 224–225. See also Josef Stern, “Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language,” in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. R. S. Cohen and H. Levine (Dordrecht, 2000), 173–226.

37. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 27.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 177.

40. For a similar claim, see Duran’s gloss on Abraham ibn Ezra’s comment on Exodus 25. MS Paris BNF héb 831, ff. 316–317.

41. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 62.

42. Ibid.

43. Cf. this passage: "Since the Author of the Hebrew language saw the multiplicity of the number of . . . existent accidents . . . and He wanted this created language to be similar to the natural and divine existent things, which lack nothing of the perfection appropriate to them according to their matter, and also none of them have a surplus nor anything unnecessary, therefore He decided to posit the roots of the verbs, which indicate the essences of these accidents in bounded time, from three letters." Ibid., 84.

44. Ibid., 60.

45. Ibid., 154.

46. Cf. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Shem*, in *Yalqut Abraham ibn Ezra*, 419–20, and his commentary on Gen. 1:1.

47. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 27.

48. A practical version of this appears in Moses Narboni's medical work, which offers the following instructions: "Write 'WPYLH on the forehead. The H indicates feminine; the letters are divided among the planets and the zodiacal constellations and what is verified by experience cannot be denied." *Sefer Orah Hayyim* f. 22a, quoted in Gerrit Bos, "R. Moshe Narboni: Philosopher and Physician, a Critical Analysis of *Sefer Orah Hayyim*," *Medieval Encounters* 1 (1995): 219–251, 240. I have emended the translation slightly. In this system, the seven planets (moon, Mercury, Venus, sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) correspond to the seven *begeḏ keferet* letters, and the twelve constellations of the zodiac correspond to the twelve remaining regular letters. The medical implication is that the letters have the ability to channel the celestial influences and, by being inscribed on the forehead, draw down beneficial powers for the healing of the patient. Duran is aware of another theory, which, as he notes, "posited the 22 letters as the number of the twelve constellations and the ten orbs, according to the opinion of some of the early sages who posited a tenth orb, called by them the heaven of beatitude, and they posited the seven ministers like the number of the ministers of the upper world." *Ma'aseh Efod*, 34.

49. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 27–28.

50. Ibid., 28. "Aristotle said . . . in ancient times, divine names had a certain ability to bring spiritual power to earth. At times, these powers descended below. At others, they killed the man who used them." *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* I, 6, *Sefer Takhlit he-ḥakham* (Munich MS 214, f. 51r.) See Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 186–242.

51. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 28.

52. Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, 2000), 86.

CHAPTER 7

1. The introduction and chapter 23 of *Ḥeshev ha-Efod* are published in *Ma'aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von*

Profiat Duran, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 7 (see also 43, note 25). The work's title is yet another example of Duran's flair for scriptural allusion. Aside from the reference to the author in the word "efod," the phrase has particular relevance as the title of a work on astronomy and the calendar. *Heshev* (חשב) comes from the same root as *heshbon*, the word for "calculation" or computation, and would have been the Hebrew equivalent of the Latin term for calendrical science, *computus*. The jewels or stones on the priestly efod were associated with the twelve tribes, and tribes and stones alike were associated with the twelve zodiacal constellations. Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut* identifies the cincture of the efod with the zodiac—"And it bears twelve constellations upon the line, the cincture of his efod" (חשב-אפדו, *Heshev afudato*)—as does the Italian owner of one of the manuscripts who translates the title as "*Computus Zodiaci*." MS Paris BNF heb 351, f. 62r.

2. A *responsum* by Isaac Israeli testifies that in the year 1334, an apostate Jew had confounded the elders of Toledo by asserting they had mistakenly calculated the advent of Nisan and as a consequence had eaten *hametz* on the first two days of Passover. The elders turned to Isaac Israeli to refute the man's claims, since they themselves were apparently not capable of doing so. Isaac Israeli, *Sefer Yesod 'Olam*, ed. B. Goldberg and L. Rosenkranz (Berlin, 1848), section 4, 36.

3. Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213–1327* (London, 1997), 129.

4. See Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 5–27; Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, 2nd Century BCE to 10th Century CE* (Oxford, 2001); and most recently, the collected essays in Sacha Stern and Charles Burnett, eds., *Time, Astronomy, and Calendars in the Jewish Tradition* (Leiden, 2013).

5. *Heshev ha-Efod*, in *Ma'aseh Efod*, German section, 43.

6. Moses Maimonides, *Sanctification of the New Moon*, trans. S. Ganz (New Haven, CT, 1956).

7. Abraham Ibn Ezra, too, versified some of the calendrical rules. See his *Sefer ha-'Ibbur*, ed. S. Halberstam (Lyck, 1874), 1b.

8. *Ibid.*, 6.

9. *Heshev ha-Efod*, in *Ma'aseh Efod*, German section, 43; MS Munich hebr 299, ff. 1r–1v.

10. MS Munich hebr 299, ff. 4v–5r.

11. *Ibid.*, ff. 19r–23v. All following quotations are from these passages.

12. See for example, A. A. Akavia, "Beraita de-Shmuel as Testimony for the History of the Calendar in the Generation Before the Finalization of the Calendrical Rules" (Hebrew), *Melilah* 5 (1955): 119–132; Abraham Lasker and Daniel Lasker, "642 Parts: More Concerning the Saadia–Ben Meir Controversy" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 60 (1990): 119–128, and their "Behold, a Moon Is Born! How the Jewish Calendar Works," *Conservative Judaism* 41 (1989): 5–19; Rahamim Sar Shalom, "The Controversy of R. Saadia Gaon and Ben Meir: The Controversy Between Bavel and the Land of Israel Regarding the

Principle of the Mean Conjunctions" (Hebrew), *Sinai* (1993): 97–124; and Tony Lévy, "Maimonide et les sciences mathématiques," in *Maimonide philosophe et savant* (1138–1204), ed. T. Lévy and R. Rashed (Leuven, 2004), 219–252, 245, note 63.

13. Otto Neugebauer, "The Astronomy of Maimonides and Its Sources," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 322–363, 330.

14. Judah Halevi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, trans. Y. Ibn Tibbon (New York, 1946), II.19.

15. *Kuzari*, II.20.

16. Abraham bar Hiyya, *Sefer ha-'Ibbur*, ed. H. E. Filipowski (London, 1851), 53–56.

17. MS Oxford Bodleian Or. 100, f. 101r.

18. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 15.

19. Bernard G. Goldstein, "Astronomy as a 'Neutral Zone': Interreligious Cooperation in Medieval Spain," *Medieval Encounters* 15 (2009): 159–174; see also his "Scientific Traditions in Late Medieval Jewish Communities," in *Les Juifs au regard de l'histoire*, eds. B. Blumenkranz and G. Dahan (Paris, 1985), 235–247, and his "The Role of Science in the Jewish Community in Fourteenth-Century France," *Annals of the NYAS* 314 (1978): 39–49.

20. A. I. Sabra, "Situating Arabic Science: Locality Versus Essence," *Isis* 87 (1996): 654–670, 662.

21. Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (London, 1962), 124; Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. T. Dunlap (Chicago, 1996), 131–132.

CHAPTER 8

1. *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 73–84.

2. *Al tehi ka-avotekha* was first printed in sixteenth-century Constantinople by Isaac ben Abraham Akrish (b. 1530), together with a few other Hebrew polemical works and a commentary on *Al tehi ka-avotekha* by the fifteenth-century Joseph ibn Shem Tov, and a short, apparently apocryphal preface to the letter that appears in some manuscripts of Ibn Shem Tov's commentary. From Abraham Geiger's republication of Akrish's *Iggeret 'Ogeret* (Breslau, 1844): "And what was widely known of this matter was that there were two men in Catalonia who at the time of the earlier persecutions left the common [group]. The name of one was maestre Profayt and the name of the second was Bonet Benjo[r]n and they consulted together to go to the land [of Israel] to return to their family and to their people. And maestre Profayt went first and he waited for Bonet for about two days' journey, and in the meantime [there was] *maestre* Paulo, an apostate, whose name before had been Don Solomon ha-Levi and he knew his intention and disputed with him and turned him back from his path. About this Bonet Benjo[r]n wrote to maestre Profayt slanderous words against the holy religion, and about the principles of faith, and the above-mentioned sage responded with this letter, and because of this introduction the intention of this letter is known"

(unpaginated). Several of the later (seventeenth- and eighteenth-century) manuscripts are themselves copied from Akrish's printed edition, and many of these include Akrish's own introduction as well.

3. Eleazar Gutwirth, "From Jewish to *Converso* Humor in Fifteenth Century Spain," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 67 (1990): 223–233, 228.

4. For mockery as a characteristic mode of irony, see Dilwyn Knox, *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony* (Leiden, 1989), 87–89.

5. *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, 75–76.

6. *Ibid.*, 74–75.

7. *Ibid.*, 73.

8. *Ibid.*, 83.

9. *Ibid.*, 74.

10. Judah Halevi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, trans. Y. ibn Tibbon (New York, 1946), I.1.

11. Near the end of the letter, Duran again alludes to the same phrase from Halevi but this time refers it to himself. He writes that *his* "intention is accepted" and his deeds are "reprovers." *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, 83; cf. Prov. 24:25.

12. Duran also subtly reverses some of the typical Christian accusations against Jews, many of which are based on the dichotomy between soul and body, spirit and letter. In particular, Duran finds occasion to contrast the material emphases of the Christian religion with the spiritual emphases of Judaism. It is not Christianity but Judaism that represents a faith oriented toward the spiritual, the heart and the mind rather than the stomach.

13. Haim ibn Musa, *Magen ve-romah*, transcr. A. Posnanski (fac., Jerusalem, 1970), 2–3.

14. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, in Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, 64.

15. Prov. 30:19.

16. Gen. 35:16: "And Rachel travailed and she had hard labor."

17. Isa. 26:17: "Like a woman with child that draws near the time of her delivery, is in pain and cries out in her pangs."

18. Is. 21:3: "Pangs have taken hold of me as the pangs of a woman in travail."

19. Jer. 4:31: "For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her that brings forth her first child."

20. Ez. 16:34: "And the contrary of women is in thee from other women, in that thou didst solicit to harlotry and was not solicited."

21. *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, 75. 1 Kings 13:6: "the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before." This phrase can be read in two ways. Either it means that Mary was like the first woman, Eve, who *before* her punishment and expulsion from Eden presumably would not have suffered pains in childbirth had she had any children. Or, and this is more likely given the context from 1 Kings, it would indicate that Mary became again physically a virgin after the birth of Jesus.

22. Duran uses it himself in *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 49.

23. Num. 7:22–26: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, In this way you shall bless the children of Israel, saying to them, The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face to

shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up his countenance to thee and give thee peace.”

24. Gen. 45:12: “And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.”

25. Job 22:3.

26. See Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977).

27. Knox, *Ironia*, 172. Knox (173) quotes Isidore of Seville (c. 570–636) as giving the definition: *sarcasmos est hostiles inrisio cum amaritudine* (Etym. I.37.29).

28. Numerous contemporary studies on irony in medieval literature have drawn a distinction between the modern conception and that known to rhetoricians and employed by writers and poets in the late medieval period. A few examples are Dennis Howard Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, UK, 1979); Simon Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony* (Cambridge, UK, 1989); and Knox, *Ironia*.

29. Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance*, 9

30. Knox, *Ironia*, 177.

31. Ibid., 92

32. Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony*, 10.

33. See Gutwirth, “From Jewish to *Converso* Humor”; also Elliott S. Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), 256–257.

34. Frank Talmage, ed., “The Francesc de Sant Jordi–Solomon Bonafed Letters,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twer-sky (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 337–364.

35. Ibid., 350.

36. See Ram Ben-Shalom, “Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages,” *AJS Review* 27 (2003): 23–72.

37. Ibn Musa, *Magen ve-romah*, 1.

38. There are eighteen MSS of *Al tehi ka-avotekha* in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Israel listed as dating from the fifteenth century, of which half are in a Sephardic hand.

39. See the satirical dialogues of Lucian (second century) and the sixth-century epistolographical work by pseudo-Libanius, which included a sarcastic letter. Knox, *Ironia*, 88.

40. By the mid-fourteenth century, the word “ironia” appears in an Occitan work, *Las flors del gay saber* (c. 1323), III, 258, Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony*, 204, note 1.

41. Pierre d’Ailly, “Epistola diaboli Leviathan ad Pseudoprelates Ecclesie pro scismate confirmando,” in *Peter von Ailli (Petrus de Alliaco): Zur Geschichte des grossen abendländischen Schisma und der Reformconcilien von Pisa und Constanza*, ed. P. Tschackert (Gotha, 1877), 15–21, English trans. I. W. Raymond in *Church History* 22 (1953): 181–191.

42. In the manuscript of d’Ailly’s letter is found the following subscription: “*Explicat ironica epistola ad impediendum generale concilium sub*

nomine Leviathan diaboli infernalis directa ejus ministries,” in Tschackert, *Peter von Ailli*, 21, note.

43. Knox, *Ironia*, 40.

44. Colbert I. Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold in Filigrees of Silver: Jewish Writing in the Eye of the Spanish Inquisition* (New York, 1995), ix.

45. Gutwirth, “From Jewish to *Converso* Humor,” 230.

46. This anecdote appears both in Gutwirth, “From Jewish to *Converso* Humor,” and in his “Gender, History, and the Judeo-Christian Polemic,” in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, ed. O. Limor and G. G. Stroumsa (Tübingen, 1996), 257–278, 260–261.

47. See the discussions in Yirmiyahu Yovel, “*Converso* Dualities in the First Generation: The *Cancioneros*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 4 (1998): 1–28; and Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold*.

48. Gregory B. Kaplan, *The Evolution of Converso Literature: The Writings of the Converted Jews of Medieval Spain* (Gainesville, FL, 2002), 37.

49. See Daniel J. Lasker, “Popular Polemics and Philosophical Truth in the Medieval Jewish Critique of Christianity,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 243–259, 256–257.

CHAPTER 9

1. See most recently Christoph Ochs, *Matthaeus Adversus Christianos: The Use of the Gospel of Matthew in Jewish Polemics Against the Divinity of Jesus* (Tübingen, 2013), 257–289; also see Carlos del Valle Rodríguez, “La impugnación del cristianismo desde la perspectiva del Jesús histórico en la obra de Profiat Duran (s. XIV–XV),” *Ibérica Judaica* 2 (2010): 143–176; David Berger, “On the Uses of History in Medieval Jewish Polemic Against Christianity: The Search for the Historical Jesus,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. E. Carlebach, J. M. Efron, and D. N. Myers (Hanover, NH, 1998), 25–39; Jeremy Cohen, “Profiat Duran’s *The Reproach of the Gentiles* and the Development of Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic,” in *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume: Studies on the History of the Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance Period* (Tel Aviv, 1993), 71–84; Frank Talmage, “The Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran,” *Immanuel* 13 (1981): 69–85; Adolf Posnanski, “Sefer Kelimat ha-Goyim, Hibbero Maestro Profiyat Duran mi-Perpinyano bi-Shnat 5157,” *Ha-Zofeh me-Eretz ha-Ger* 3 (1914): 99–101, 4 (1915): 125–132; Eleazar Gutwirth, “History and Apologetics in XVth C. Hispano-Jewish Thought,” *Helmantica* 35 (1984): 231–242; Joel E. Rembaum, “Medieval Jewish Criticism of the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 7–8 (1982–1983): 353–382.

2. See Ram Ben-Shalom, “Hasdai Crescas: Portrait of a Leader at a Time of Crisis,” in *The Jew in Medieval Iberia 1100–1500*, ed. J. Ray (Boston, 2012), 309–351.

3. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 66.

4. Georges Duby, *L'Europe des cathédrales 1140–1280* (Geneva, 1966), 103.

5. Some scholars (Frank Talmage in particular) have suggested that Duran's criticism of the sacraments and clergy stemmed from his awareness of contemporary Christian critics of the church, in particular reformers like John Wycliffe (1320–1384) and Jan Hus (1372–1415), or Conciliarists like Marsilius of Padua. Similarities exist, but no conclusive evidence has been adduced to make the connection more than a supposition. See Christoph Ochs, who points out that in the case of one argument against the Eucharist, "the similarity between Duran and Wycliffe probably derives from the fact that they both appear to extrapolate their respective anti-Eucharist polemic from Lombardus' *Sententiae* 4.13.1." Ochs, *Matthaeus Adversus Christianos*, 265, note 34.

6. Cohen, "Profiat Duran's *The Reproach of the Gentiles*." It is also how Hasdai Crescas described his own approach in his *Light of the Lord*, a criticism of philosophical principles, where in the preface he writes: "And the inquiry is according to the speaker's own speech."

7. Acts 21: 21, 23–24, 26.

8. Mat. 5:17–19.

9. *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, 80.

10. Netanyahu speculates (Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century* [New York, 1966], 222) that Crescas read *Al tehi ka-avotekha* but thought it was too hard to understand and asked Duran for a more straightforward attack on Christianity's dogmas on logical and philosophical grounds. When Duran sent him this instead, Crescas simply wrote it himself (*Bittul 'ikkarei ha-notzrim*). But perhaps Duran did not misunderstand the request. It is possible that Crescas read *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, picked up on this passage, and asked Duran to elaborate a full attack along the lines of *kefi ma'amar ha-'omer*. Crescas may simply have written his own polemic in the philosophical mode he was comfortable with. Crescas certainly was philosophically expert enough to write it without any input from Duran; what he may not have had was a firm enough grasp of the particulars of Christian doctrine.

11. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 3.

12. For an exposition of this chapter with extensive translations, see Ochs, *Matthaeus Adversus Christianos*, 265–281.

13. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

14. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

15. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

16. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

17. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

18. Is. 6:10: *השמן לב העם הזה*.

19. Mat. 13:15: "*incrassatum est enim cor populi huius* et auribus graviter audierunt et oculos suos cluserunt nequando oculis videant et auribus audiant et corde intellegant et convertantur et sanem eos."

20. Is. 6:10 "*excaeca cor populi huius* et aures eius adgrava et oculos eius claude ne forte videat oculis suis et auribus suis audiat et corde suo intellegat et convertatur et sanem eum".

21. See Gad Freudenthal, "Holiness and Defilement: The Ambivalent Perception of Philosophy by Its Opponents in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Micrologus* 9 (2001): 169–193.

22. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 4.

23. See Judg. 14:4.

24. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 4.

25. *Ibid.*, 32.

26. *Ibid.*, 34.

27. *Ibid.*, 42.

28. *Ibid.*, 60–62.

29. *Ibid.*, 24, 49.

30. *Ibid.*, 39.

31. *Ibid.*, 49.

32. *Ibid.*, 20.

33. *Ibid.*, 11.

34. *Ibid.*, 12.

35. *Ibid.*, 13.

36. *Ibid.*, 36.

37. Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977), 255. See also Philippe Bobichon, "Citations latines de la tradition chrétienne dans la littérature hébraïque de controverse avec le christianisme (XIIe–XVe s.)," in *Latin-into-Hebrew: Studies and Texts*, vol. 1, ed. R. Fontaine and G. Freudenthal (Leiden, 2013), 349–388, 363: Bobichon notes that most Jewish polemicists seem to have translated their quotations from the Gospels on the spot and not to have used a preexisting Hebrew version, because he finds that if they quote the same verses more than once, the wording varies. Curiously he finds fewer variations in the case of *Kelimat ha-goyim*; I would tend to attribute this to Duran's general punctiliousness and his particular care for exact wording with respect to the texts he is interpreting.

38. A Hebrew version of this work was circulating in the fourteenth century, and was inserted by Shem Tov ibn Shaprut into his *Even Bohan*. See Libby Garshowitz, "Shem Tov ben Isaac Ibn Shaprut's Gospel of Matthew," in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, vol. 1, ed. B. Walfish (Haifa, 1992), 297–322; George Howard, *The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, GA, 1995); José Vicente Niclós Albarracín, "L'évangile en hébreu de Shem Tob ibn Shaprut: Une traduction d'origine judéo-catalane due à un converti, replace dans son 'Sitz im Leben,'" *Revue Biblique* 106 (1999): 358–407; José Vicente Niclós Albarracín and Marta Raurer Domènech, "Aspectos gramaticales en el Evangelio en hebreo de 'La Piedra de Toque' de ibn Shaprut," *LA* 51 (2001): 145–182.

39. By 1403 Duran may have read some Latin grammar as well, using in *Ma'aseh Eford* grammatical terms like the infinitive that he may have come to know through the intermediary of Latin. Cyril Aslanoff, "La réflexion linguistique hébraïque dans l'horizon intellectuel de l'Occident médiéval: Essai de comparaison des traités de grammaire hébraïque et provençale dans la perspective de l'histoire des doctrines grammaticales," *Revue des études juives* 155 (1996): 5–32.

40. See Luis García-Ballester, Lola Ferre, and Eduard Feliu, "Jewish Appreciation of Fourteenth-Century Scholastic Medicine," *Osiris*, 2nd series, 6 (1990): 85–117; Luis García-Ballester, "La minoría judía ante la filosofía natural y la medicina escolásticas: Problemas sobre la comunicación científica en la Europa meridional de los siglos XIII a XV," in *Proyección histórica de España en sus tres culturas: Castilla y León, América y el Mediterráneo*, ed. E. L. Sanz (Valladolid, 1993), 101–128, esp. 111; Gad Freudenthal, "Arabic and Latin Cultures as Resources for the Hebrew Translation Movement: Comparative Considerations, Both Quantitative and Qualitative," in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 74–105; and Danièle Iancu-Agou, "La pratique du latin chez les médecins juifs et néophytes de Provence médiévale (XIVe–XVIe siècles)," in Fontaine and Freudenthal, *Latin-into-Hebrew*, 1, 85–102.

41. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 14. Duran does not seem to have understood which part of the clause was the one usually missing from some of the manuscripts, however, which may cast his testimony here into some doubt.

42. For this translation, see Talmage's note 3, *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 33.

43. Is. 29 alludes to the redemption to come and Duran makes reference to different verses from the chapter throughout his writings.

44. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 3.

45. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 178.

46. MS Cambridge UL Add. 1835, MS Vienna ON hebr. 95.

47. Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain*, 86.

48. See the suggestion by Netanyahu that Crescas intended to edit it and circulate it "with little regard for authorship." *Ibid.*, 222.

CHAPTER 10

1. Eulogy printed in *Ma'aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 191–196. See Elliott Horowitz, "Speaking of the Dead: The Emergence of the Eulogy Among Italian Jewry of the Sixteenth Century," in *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. D. Ruderman (Berkeley, 1992), 129–162, 133. See also the translated portions of the eulogy and the discussion in Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1961–1966), 2, 156–158. For the identity of this man, an associate of the circle of Saragossan poets, see the introduction to Abraham ben Isaac ha-Levi Tamakh, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, ed. L. A. Feldman (Assen, 1970); Judit Targarona Borrás, "Carta inédita de Selomoh de Piera al Rab Abraham ben Yisshaq ha-Levi," *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos*. Sección de hebreo 49 (2000): 165–189; Eleazar Gutwirth, "Religion and Social Criticism in Late Medieval Rousillon: An Aspect of Profayt Duran's Activities," *Michael* 12 (1991): 135–156, 145–150.

2. Gutwirth, "Religion and Social Criticism," 146, 149.

3. Cf. Ez. 2:7–8. Cf. *Kelimat ha-Goyim*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 17–18: "The misleaders posited that the cause and purpose of the Incarnation was that death entered into

Adam and his seed for his *meri* in transgressing the command of the Lord, may He be blessed, not to eat of the tree of knowledge . . . and the *meri* and this sin follow from Adam [and fall upon] his seed—they call this ‘original’ sin—that is, born with man.”

4. Eulogy, 192.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.; Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), III.51, 619.

7. See Sarah Klein-Braslavy, “R. Nissim ben Reuben de Gerone devant la philosophie de son temps” (PhD. diss., Sorbonne, 1972).

8. Shalom Rosenberg, “The *Arba’ah Turim* of Rabbi Abraham bar Judah, Disciple of Don Hasdai Crescas” (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983–1984): 525–621, 602; see also Eric Lawee, “The Path to Felicity: Teachings and Tensions in *Even Shetiyah* of Abraham ben Judah, Disciple of Hasdai Crescas,” *Mediaeval Studies* 59 (1997): 183–223, 193.

9. Rosenberg, “The *Arba’ah Turim* of Rabbi Abraham bar Judah,” 603.

10. Ibid., 606.

11. Jer. 11:15. All of God’s responses here are taken from this one verse.

12. b. Men. 53b. Eulogy, 194.

13. “The Lord called thy name, a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken.” Jer. 11:16; Eulogy, 194.

14. Eulogy, 195.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Shaul Regev, “The Attitude Towards the *Conversos* in 15th–16th Century Thought,” *REJ* 156 (1997): 117–134, 129; see also Isaac Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought, 1250–1650* (The Hague, 1967), 150–163.

18. Beatrice Leroy, *Les Juifs du bassin de l’Èbre* (Biarritz, 1997), 150. See also Encarnación Marín Padilla, “Relación judeo conversa durante la segunda mitad del siglo XV en Aragón: Nacimientos, hadas, circuncisiones,” *Sefarad* 41 (1981): 59–88.

19. Daniel Lasker, “Original Sin and Its Atonement According to Hasdai Crescas” (Hebrew), *Daat* 20 (1988): 127–135, 129, note 10; Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK, 1985), 365–366. *Kelimat ha-Goyim*, 17–18.

20. *Guide* III. 49, 609–610. See also Josef Stern, “Maimonides on the Covenant of Circumcision and the Unity of God,” in *The Midrashic Imagination: Exegesis, Thought and History*, ed. M. Fishbane (Albany, 1993), 131–154.

21. Moses Narboni, *Pirquei Moshe* 2; quoted in Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, 339.

22. Eulogy, 195.

23. “In 1393, only two years after the riots, the philosopher Profayt Duran, himself a forced convert, observed that a ‘part’ of the converts is so remiss or failing in the practice of Judaism that it is generally believed to

have left the fold, while others among them so ‘enjoyed’ their freedom from the burden of the Jewish precepts as to put in question even the possibility that they might ever return to the right path.” Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York, 1995), 209.

24. Eulogy, 195.

25. Ibid; see the abbreviated translation in Marc Saperstein, “*Your Voice Like a Ram’s Horn*”: *Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati, 1996), 263–264.

26. Eulogy, 195.

27. Daniel Lasker, “Proselyte Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81 (1990): 75–92, 86.

28. Eulogy, 195. The whole passage differs in many places from the ibn Tibbon text (*Sefer ha-Kuzari*, New York, 1996), but is close enough to be based on it. The italicized portions are those appearing almost word for word in the ibn Tibbon text, while the rest are interpolations, perhaps glosses. Probably Duran is paraphrasing, with his own explanatory additions.

29. Eulogy, 195–196; Duran explains the last part of the verse, “before all the nations,” as meaning “the signs and wonders that will be created then will be for the purpose of making known publicly—not in secret and in silence, like the deeds of the messiahs of the false religions—but just like the wonders that were done by the lord of the prophets [Moses], as it is said ‘According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt’ (Mic. 7:15).”

30. Dan. 12:3.

31. Eulogy, 196.

32. Saperstein, “*Your Voice Like a Ram’s Horn*,” 263.

33. Ibid., 261.

34. Eulogy, 195.

35. Saperstein, “*Your Voice Like a Ram’s Horn*,” 263–264.

36. Mark D. Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 184–185.

37. Frank Talmage, “Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch,” *Medieval Studies* 47 (1985): 379–415, 383, 395–396.

38. Benjamin R. Gampel, “The Decline of Iberian Jewries: Pogroms, Inquisition and Expulsion,” in *Sephardim: A Cultural Journey from Spain to the Pacific*, ed. J. Stampfer (Portland, OR, 1987), 36–57.

39. David Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain,” *Past & Present* 174 (2002): 3–41. See also the attacks on Jesus’ lineage by a “rabbi” answered by Francesc Eiximenis between 1379 and 1381. David J. Viera, “The Evolution of Francesc Eiximenis’s Attitudes Toward Judaism,” in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. S. E. Meyers and S. J. McMichael (Leiden, 2004), 147–159. Viera suggests that Duran and Eiximenis may later have become acquainted while serving in the same royal court (157).

CHAPTER 11

1. Studies of various aspects of the work include: Selig Gronemann, *De Profiatii Durani (Efodaei) vita Ac studiis* (Bratislava, 1869); Naftali Wieder, "'Sanctuary' as a Metaphor for Scripture," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 8 (1956–1957): 165–175; Isadore Twersky, "Religion and Law," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 69–82; Eleazar Gutwirth, "Religion and Social Criticism in Late Medieval Rousillon: An Aspect of Profayt Duran's Activities," *Michael* 12 (1991): 135–156; Joseph Gutmann, "Masorah Figurata in the Mikdashyah: The Messianic Solomon Temple in a 14th-Century Spanish Hebrew Bible Manuscript," in *VIII International Congress of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies*, ed. E. J. Revell (Atlanta, 1990), 71–77; Kalman Bland, "Medieval Jewish Aesthetics: Maimonides, Body, and Scripture in Profiat Duran," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 533–559, and *The Artless Jew* (Princeton, NJ, 2000); Irene E. Zwiep, *Mother of Reason and Revelation: A Short History of Medieval Jewish Linguistic Thought* (Amsterdam, 1997); Cyril Aslanoff, "La réflexion linguistique hébraïque dans l'horizon intellectuel de l'Occident médiéval: Essai de comparaison des traités de grammaire hébraïque et provençale dans la perspective de l'histoire des doctrines grammaticales," *Revue des études juives* 155 (1996): 5–32; Ram Ben-Shalom, "Me'ir Nativ: The First Hebrew Concordance of the Bible and Jewish Bible Study in the Fifteenth Century, in the Context of Jewish-Christian Polemics," *Aleph* 11 (2011): 289–364; Florence Touati, *Préface au Maasse-Efod de Profiat Duran (1403): Traduction et commentaire* (Barcelona, 2007) (see the Appendix). The most important study of the grammar is Josef Stern, "Profayt Duran's Ma'aseh Efod: The Philosophical Grammar of a Converso," in *The Origin and Nature of Language and Logic in Medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Thought*. Rencontres de philosophie médiévale, ed. S. Harvey and N. Germann (Turnhout, forthcoming).

2. See, for example, Eleazar Gutwirth, "From Jewish to *Converso* Humor in Fifteenth Century Spain," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 67 (1990): 223–233; Colbert I. Nepaulsingh, *Apples of Gold in Filigrees of Silver: Jewish Writing in the Eye of the Spanish Inquisition* (New York, 1995); Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Converso Dualities in the First Generation: The *Cancioneros*," *JSS* 4 (1998): 1–28; Gregory B. Kaplan, *The Evolution of Converso Literature: The Writings of the Converted Jews of Medieval Spain* (Gainesville, FL, 2002); Thomas F. Glick, "On *Converso* and Marrano Ethnicity," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardi World (1391–1648)*, ed. B. Gampel (New York, 1998), 59–76; Renee Levine Melammed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective* (Oxford, 2004), and *Heretics or Daughters of Israel? The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (New York, 1999); David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia, 1996); Bruce Rosenstock, *New Men: Conversos, Christian Theology, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Castile* (London, 2002).

3. See my discussion in the previous chapter. On the "scoundrel" versus "innocent" type of *converso*, see Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Innocent Converso:

Identity and Rhetoric in the *Igeret Orbit* Genre Following the Persecution of 1391,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 10 (2014): 55–74.

4. *Ma’aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 17, 18–19.

5. Basil Herring, *Joseph ibn Kaspi’s Gevia’ Kesef: A Study in Medieval Jewish Philosophic Bible Commentary* (New York, 1982), 23–24.

6. This verse was used by Nahmanides as the opening phrase of his derash that goes by that title, “The Torah of the Lord Is Perfect.” Like Duran he asks why these lines follow directly on the naturalistic description of the heavens. The verse also appears in the opening paragraph of Moses Narboni’s commentary on the *Guide*.

7. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 1.

8. *Ibid.*, 2.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 3.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 4–10.

15. Duran’s depiction of Iberian Jewish society as being divided into Talmudists, philosophers, and kabbalists was likely constructed for rhetorical purposes, and does not reflect true, uncrossable boundaries. See, for example, Narboni, a radical Averroist who was open to the thought of Abraham Abulafia. Moshe Idel, “The Influence of *Sefer ‘Or haSekhel* on R. Moses Narboni and R. Abraham Shalom,” in his *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, 1988), 63–71.

16. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 4.

17. The term “wicked” (*resha’im*) is associated with natural science (physics) since nature in this opinion is the beginning of motion, and the Hebrew root (r-sh-‘) appears connected to motion.

18. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 6.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

21. Duran refers several times in his writings to this parable, usually as “proof” for the benefit of studying the secular sciences; only here does he (re) interpret it.

22. For more on the complicated argument developed by Duran to rehabilitate Maimonides and moderate Maimonidean philosophy, see my “No Perpetual Enemies: Maimonideanism at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century,” in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, ed. J. T. Robinson (Leiden, 2009), 150–170, esp. 161–164.

23. *Ma’aseh Efod*, 6–8.

24. *Ibid.*, 9.

25. *Ibid.*, 15.

26. *Ibid.*, 9.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid, 10.

30. See Frank Talmage, "Keep Your Sons from Scripture: The Bible in Medieval Jewish Scholarship and Spirituality," in *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation*, ed. C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York, 1987), 81–101; and Twersky, "Religion and Law"; see also Kozodoy, "No Perpetual Enemies," 156–170.

31. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 10.

32. Note that Isaac Nathan in the mid-fifteenth century describes a group of wealthy *conversos* who gathered themselves into a confraternity and seem to have fulfilled their religious life by giving charity and retaining a belief in the One God. Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Social History of Apostasy Among Fifteenth-Century Spanish Jewry," in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. J. Cohen and M. Rosman (Oxford, 2009), 73–198, 189.

33. See the discussion in David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia, 1996), 135–168; John Edwards, "Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria Circa 1450–1500," *Past & Present* 120 (1988): 3–25, 8. You could be a "practicing Catholic" just as you could be an "observant Jew."

34. Hasdai Crescas holds up the priestly blessing as a comparable ritual to that of the Christian Mass. Duran too finds them similar, but denies power to the words of the priest, because they came from a human source, where he ascribes true power to the biblical words spoken by the members of the priestly class, which derive from a divine source.

35. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:24).

36. Also Gal. 3:2: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

37. Duran then comments that Christianity is so deficient that it hardly merits the term "Law," which Jesus himself did not use. Instead Jesus, when talking about his commands regarding the bread and the wine, called it a "new covenant."

38. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 34.

39. In that interpretation, Duran follows the Christian division, with the one difference that where it makes reference to examining the Law from the point of view of its divine agent, and how well it testifies to the existence of God, Duran reads the word "testimonies" in the psalm as referring to those commandments that testify to the nature of divinity, namely the Sabbath and holidays and tefillin and so on. In *Ma'aseh Efod*, he replaces this interpretation with "narrative." That is to say, "testimonies" refers to the stories contained in the Torah.

CHAPTER 12

1. Jan R. Veenstra, "Honorius and the Sigil of God: The *Liber iuratus* in Berengario Ganell's *Summa sacre magice*," in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic*

Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, ed. C. Fanger (University Park, PA, 2012), 151–191, 181. The word *sigil* is often used for single magical symbols, but can also refer to a larger, more elaborate diagram.

2. Reimund Leicht, “Toward a History of Astrological Literature in Hebrew: A Bibliographical Survey,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 255–291, 291.

3. For example, see Katelyn Mesler, “The *Liber iuratus Honorii* and the Christian Reception of Angel Magic,” in Fanger, *Invoking Angels*, 113–150; and Richard Kieckhefer, “The Devil’s Contemplatives: The *Liber iuratus*, the *Liber visionum* and the Christian Appropriation of Jewish Occultism,” in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. C. Fanger (University Park, PA, 1998), 250–265.

4. See in particular Katelyn Mesler, “The Three Magi and Other Christian Motifs in Medieval Hebrew Medical Incantations: A Study in the Limits of Faithful Translation,” in *Latin-into-Hebrew: Studies and Texts*, vol. 1, ed. R. Fontaine and G. Freudenthal (Leiden, 2012), 161–218.

5. Nicolas Weill-Parot, “Astrology, Astral Influences, and Occult Properties in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Traditio* 65 (2010): 201–230, 228.

6. Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley, 1994), 39–40. Astrology was even included in the medical licensing exam in fourteenth-century Aragon.

7. Gerrit Bos, Charles Burnett, and Y. Tzvi Langermann, eds., *Hebrew Medical Astrology: David Ben Yom Tov, Kelal Qatan: Original Hebrew Text, Medieval Latin Translation, Modern English Translation* (Philadelphia, 2005), 83, 87.

8. MS Vatican ebr 356, fol. 39a. Outside the medical arena, this use of numerical calculations for the purposes of accessing arcane knowledge bears some resemblance to geomancy, a type of divination, often astrologically based, stemming from the Arabic world and also known from Jewish geomantic manuals, in Hebrew *Sifrei goralot*. See Evelyn Burkhardt, “Hebraische Losbuchhandschriften: Zur Typologie einer jüdischen Divinationsmethode,” in *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines*, ed. K. Herrmann, M. Schlüter, and G. Veltri (Leiden, 2003), 95–148.

9. Leicht, “Toward a History of Astrological Literature,” 285. See also Joseph Shatzmiller, “In Search of the Book of Figures: Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century,” *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 7–8 (1982–1983): 383–407.

10. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York, 1939). See also Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK, 1989).

11. See Abraham Rimokh’s meditational seclusion devoted to the ritual study of the book of Psalms. Frank Talmage, “Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch,” *Medieval Studies* 47 (1985): 379–415.

12. Bill Rebigier, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim: Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen: Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Tübingen, 2010), 172–176.

13. See Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

14. See Lluís Cifuentes i Comamala, *La Ciència en català a l'Edat Mitjana i el Renaixement* (Barcelona, 2006), 223–229.

15. MS Munich 214, ff. 46r–101v. See also London BL Or 9861, ff. 1r–38v. Both these versions are abbreviated, missing the introduction, and from fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Italy. Another, longer version can be found in New York JTS 2465 and 2470 (the two belong together).

16. Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der astrologischen Literatur der Juden* (Tübingen, 2007), 318.

17. MS Munich 214, f. 49v. תחקה צורת עקרב בגוף בזהר ' טלסם לנשיכת העקרבים ' תחקה בראש הפנים השניים ממנו והעולה אריה או שור או דלי ותרכהו על בשעת הלבנה והלבנה בעקרב טלסם בראש הפנים השניים ממנו ותשקה ממנו לנשוך ותרכהו בשעתו טבעת זהב ותרכהו בלבנה לעוסה ותשקה ממנו לנשוך ותרכהו בשעתו.

18. There are three extant mss: Munich 214, ff. 1r–26v; Paris BNF heb 1016, ff. 19v–43r, from fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Iberia; and JNUL hebr.8 151, Italian from the seventeenth century. See Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, and his “Toward a History of Astrological Literature,” 289. See also Bernd Roling, “The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin,” in *The Metamorphosis of Magic: From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. J. N. Brenner and J. R. Veenstra (Leuven, 2002), 231–265, 242–244.

19. Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 306–308.

20. *Ma'aseh Efod: Einleitung in das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache von Profiat Duran*, ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn (Vienna, 1865), 28. He may be referring to the statement, compressed from the Latin version in the abbreviated Hebrew text, to the effect that the strongest talismans are those built upon the agency of the seven planets, that once upon a time divine names were used to bring down the *ruhaniyut* (“spirituality”), that sometimes this action was so powerful that it killed the one who pronounced the names, and that magical incantations, if they are to work, need God's will to enable the *ruhaniyut* to pass into the sublunar material world. MS Munich 214, fol. 51r.: ולארסטו' מאמ' אמר כן כי היותר חשוב מה שנבנה עליו הטלסם הוא פעולת השבעה: כוכבי לכת והעליון שבהם והיותר מתמיד מהם הוא אשר יקבלהו מזל מצליח יסייע על הורדת רוחניותו אל הארץ מהגלגל ' ואמר בזמן הקדום היה בשמות האלהיות דבר מה בשתוריד בו הרוחניות אל הארץ ירדו לשפל ' ולפעמים יהרגו למוריד כשלא יהיה בשבע רוחניות הכוכב היורד ' ואמר לחש הכשוף לא יעבור עגלת הארץ מה שיקרב הארץ הזאת בהורדת מה שיורד אך כל הלחש לא יגיע זה התכלית מפעולתו אלא אם תהיה התקוה מיוחסת באלוה הגדול כי הוא יניע הרוחניות ההיא ומצוה אותה לשוב אל החיולי ושולח אותה אל נקדת הארץ.

21. Claire Fanger, introduction to *Invoking Angels*, 2.

22. See Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park, PA, 2013).

23. See, for example, Moshe Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 186–242.

24. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy* (Los Angeles, 2000). Also see his “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence: Angelic Embodiment

and the Alterity of Time in Abraham Abulafia,” in *Saintly Influence: Edith Wyschogrod and the Possibilities of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. E. Boynton and M. Kavka (New York, 2009), 113–149, esp. 117–118, 133.

25. Gösta Hedegard, ed., *Liber iuratus Honorii: A Critical Edition of the Latin Version of the Sworn Book of Honorius* (Stockholm, 2002). See also Mesler, “The *Liber iuratus Honorii*”; and Veenstra, “Honorius and the Sigil of God.”

26. Julien Véronèse, ed., *L'Ars notoria au Moyen Âge: Introduction et édition critique* (Florence, 2007).

27. Claire Fanger, “Medieval Ritual Magic: What It Is and Why We Need to Know More About It,” in Fanger, *Conjuring Spirits*, vii–xviii, viii.

28. Kieckhefer, “The Devil’s Contemplatives,” 256.

29. Veenstra, “Honorius and the Sigil of God,” 151–152.

30. Mesler, “The *Liber iuratus honorii*,” 119.

31. Frank Klaassen, “English Manuscripts of Ritual Magic, 1300–1500: A Preliminary Survey,” in Fanger, *Conjuring Spirits*, 3–31, 14. “Its fusion of learned and spiritual goals, of the practices of university learning and highly ritualized contemplative exercises, no doubt appealed to the sensibilities, self-conceptions, and desires of those in the orbit of the university.” Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic*, 94.

32. The translation was done, according to Yohanan Alemanno, by one Shlomo ben Natan Orguieri of Aix. Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 369–370.

33. Veenstra, “Honorius and the Sigil of God,” 160.

34. Harvey J. Hames, “Jewish Magic with a Christian Text: A Hebrew Translation of Ramon Llull’s *Ars brevis*,” *Traditio* 54 (1999): 283–300; see also his “Between the March of Ancona and Florence: Jewish Magic and a Christian Text,” in Fanger, *Invoking Angels*, 294–311.

35. See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, entry *khāssah*; also Weill-Parot, “Astrology, Astral Influences, and Occult Properties,” 205–207; and Sebastià Giralt, “‘Proprietas’: Las propiedades ocultas según Arnau de Vilanova,” *Traditio* 3 (2008): 327–360, and the bibliography there, 328, note 2.

36. Maimonides, *Treatise on Poisons*.

37. *Guide* III.37.

38. Ps. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefer Hanisyonot: The Book of Medical Experiences*, ed. J. O. Leibowitz and S. Marcus (Jerusalem, 1984), 145–146. It is possible that the Arabic text is to be identified with Abū-l-Mutrib ‘Abd al-Rahman’s *Book of Satisfaction in Treatment with Occult Substances*. See Mahmud Hasani, “A Unique Manuscript of the Medieval Medical Treatise al-Iktifā’ by Abū-l-Mutrib ‘Abd al-Rahman,” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 5 (1999): 20–24.

39. See also Y. Tzvi Langermann, “Gersonides on the Magnet and the Heat of the Sun,” in *Studies on Gersonides, a Fourteenth Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Leiden, 1992), 267–284.

40. Arnaldus de Villanova, *Arnaldi de Villanova Opera medica omnia*, VI.1: *Medicationis parabole*, ed. L. Garcia-Ballester, M. R. McVaugh and J. A. Paniagua (Barcelona, 1990), 42–43.

41. Nathan ben Yoel Falaquera, *Tzori ha-Guf*, ed. Z. Amar and Y. Buchman (Ramat Gan, 2004), 101.

42. Weill-Parot, "Astrology, Astral Influences, and Occult Properties," 212.

43. John Scott Lucas, *Astrology and Numerology in Medieval and Early Modern Catalonia: The tractat de prenostication de la vida natural dels hòmens* (Leiden, 2003), 159: "e mes son occasions psalms e paraules e[n] las quales nostro senyor ha posada virtut."

44. Dov Schwartz, "Astral Magic and Specific Properties (*Segullot*) in Medieval Jewish Thought: Non-Aristotelian Science and Theology," in Freudenthal, *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, 301–319.

45. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 10.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 11.

48. Talya Fishman has argued that Duran envisaged the use of the Hebrew Bible itself as a "collational site for guided meditation," suggesting that Duran sought to use the Hebrew Scriptures in order to visualize the Temple, and also as a talisman to bring down the divine efflux and divine providence. Talya Fishman, "Sensing Torah: A Medieval Jewish Thinker on Beauty as a Springboard to Faith," paper presented at MAA Meeting in New Haven, CT, March 19, 2010. See also her "The Hebrew Bible and the Senses in Late Medieval Spain," in *Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of David B. Ruderman*, ed. R. I. Cohen, N. B. Dohrmann, A. Shear, and E. Reiner (Cincinnati, 2014), 75–84.

49. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 4.

50. *Ibid.*, 24–25. Duran illustrates this with various verses from Psalm 119:18, 12, 33, 34, 66, and 93.

51. Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 172–176.

52. *Kelimat ha-Goyim*, in *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, ed. F. Talmage (Jerusalem, 1981), 35. Duran explicitly contrasts the problematic mental and spiritual status of the Christian priest with the elevated status of the high priest, who we presume was perfect in both piety and intellect. See also Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics Against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen, 1993), 160–161; Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Philosophical Critique of Transubstantiation," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians*, ed. J. Reinharz and D. Swetchinski (Durham, NC, 1982), 99–118, 100–101.

53. *Al tehi ka-avotekha*, in Talmage, *Kitvei Polmos le-Profet Duran*, 77.

54. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 10.

55. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

56. *Ibid.*, 13.

57. See Josef Stern, "Profayt Duran's *Ma'aseh Efod*: The Philosophical Grammar of a *Converso*," in *The Origin and Nature of Language and Logic in Medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Thought*, *Rencontres de philosophie médiévale*, ed. S. Harvey and N. Germann (Turnhout, forthcoming). Stern comes to this important insight by reading the introduction against the grammatical parts of *Ma'aseh Efod*, something, he notes correctly, no one

else has done. I am deeply grateful to Josef Stern for sharing a prepublication draft of this article with me. I am indebted to him for much. I must note that we diverge slightly in how we interpret the term *segulah*.

58. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 11.

59. *Ibid.*, 13.

60. *Kelimat ha-goyim*, 45.

61. *Ma'aseh Efod*, 13.

62. Aviezer Ravitzky, "Samuel Ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 6 (1981): 87–123.

63. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 204–228.

64. See the references to Duran in Alemanno's recommendations in Moshe Idel, "The Study Program of R. Yohanan Alemanno" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 48 (1979–1980): 303–331.

65. Some of the manuscripts of Duran's scientific work show marginal comments by Finzi.

66. See his *Lev ha-Aryeh*, where the third chapter presents a summary of Duran's fifteen methods of improving the memory. Also see Gerrit Bos, "Jewish Traditions on Strengthening Memory and Leone Modena's Evaluation," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995): 39–58.

67. See Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, "The Science of Language Among Medieval Jews," in Freudenthal, *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, 359–424.

68. Ram Ben-Shalom, "*Me'ir Nativ*: The First Hebrew Concordance of the Bible and Jewish Bible Study in the Fifteenth Century, in the Context of Jewish-Christian Polemics," *Aleph* 11 (2011): 289–364.

CONCLUSION

1. David Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, 2003). See also Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Chicago, 2005).

2. Some of the most important synthetic articles dealing with this issue are: Gad Freudenthal, "Les sciences dans les communautés juives médiévales de Provence: Leur appropriation, leur rôle," *REJ* 152 (1993): 29–136, "Science in the Medieval Jewish Culture of Southern France," *History of Science* 33 (1995): 23–58, "Arav and Edom as Cultural Resources for Medieval Judaism: Contrasting Attitudes Toward Arabic and Latin Learning in the Midi and in Italy," in *Late Medieval Jewish Identities: Iberia and Beyond*, ed. C. Caballero-Navas and E. Alfonso (New York, 2010), 123–156, and "Arabic and Latin Cultures as Resources for the Hebrew Translation Movement: Comparative Considerations, Both Quantitative and Qualitative," *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. G. Freudenthal (Cambridge, UK, 2011), 74–105; Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Science in the Jewish Communities of the Iberian Peninsula," in *The Jews and the Sciences in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, UK, 1999), 1–54, 18–25, and "Hebrew Astronomy: Deep Soundings from a Rich Tradition," in *Astronomy Across*

Cultures: The History of Non-Western Astronomy, ed. H. Selin (Dordrecht, 2000), 555–584.

3. Maimonides was a figure of authority not just among those explicitly engaged in philosophy, but also for Iberian Jews in general, among them rabbinic scholars as much as kabbalists. Scientific and philosophical attainments could thus be accorded a certain status in the Jewish community, even given the well-known controversies of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries over the nature and validity of Maimonidean thought.

4. Frank Talmage, “Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch,” *Medieval Studies* 47 (1985): 379–415, 400.

5. Mariano Gómez-Aranda, “Science and Jewish Identity in the Works of Abraham Zacut (1452–1515),” in Caballero-Navas and Alfonso, *Late Medieval Jewish Identities*, 157–170, 161.

6. “Applying the laws of astronomy to religious purposes, such as the fixation of the Jewish calendar, constitutes an expression of the Jewish identity of the scientist, and contributes to making science ‘Jewish.’” Ibid., 168.

7. See Eric Lawee on “rationalism and its discontents,” including discussion of Duran, in his “Sephardic Intellectuals: Challenges and Creativity (1391–1492),” in *The Jew in Medieval Iberia, 1100–1500*, ed. J. Ray (Boston, 2012), 352–394, 357–367.

8. For reasons such as a desire to marry a Christian or a Jew who would have been prohibited from marriage by rabbinic law; as a response to being excommunicated from the Jewish community; in order to be pardoned for a crime; or out of a desire to escape poverty, see Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391* (Philadelphia, 2012), 63–80.

9. While early discussions of the *conversos* as a group tended to classify them as either true Christians (Netanyahu) or faithful Jews (Baer), more recent scholarship has generally attempted to draw out the ambiguities of their identity. What seems to have developed in some cases was a kind of syncretism, where Jewish and Christian observances mixed. Mark Meyerson has pointed out that in such cases, one should probably give greater weight to the Jewish element in the individual’s identity, for the simple reason that it was a dangerous choice to Judaize. Mark Meyerson, “Review of Gretchen D. Starr-LeBeau, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars, and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain*,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 91.4 (2005): 795–797.

10. See Encarnación Marín Padilla, “Relación judeoconversa durante la segunda mitad del siglo XV en Aragón: Nacimientos, hadas, circuncisiones,” *Sefarad* 42 (1981): 273–300, 42 (1982): 59–77, 243–298, 43 (1983): 251–344. See also Ram Ben-Shalom, “Conflict Between Jews and Converts in Aragon: New Testimonies from the Formulary of Yom Tov ben Hannah of Montalbán,” *Sefarad* 73 (2013): 97–131, 121–122, “The Innocent Converso: Identity and Rhetoric in the *Igeret Orhit* Genre Following the Persecution of 1391,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 10 (2014): 55–74, 74, and “The Social Context of Apostasy Among Fifteenth-Century Spanish Jewry,” in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. J. Cohen and M. Rosman (Oxford, 2009), 73–198, 191–198. Evidence from rabbinic *responsa* dealing with the first

generation of *conversos* shows a concern for issues that relate to coexistence. Dora Zsom, *Conversos in the Responsa of Sephardic Halakhic Authorities in the 15th Century* (Piscataway, NJ, 2014). As Nirenberg has shown, this mixing was troubling for the church, and its central concern during the early years was to reinforce the boundaries between *converso* and Jew. David Nirenberg, "Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain," *Common Knowledge* 9 (2003): 137–155, 153.

11. See Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Converso Dualities in the First Generation: The Cancioneros," *Jewish Social Studies* 4 (1998): 1–28.

12. See Kathryn Reyerson, who writes of the "ambiguities characteristic of the medieval merchant identity" and notes that "identity is constructed, not innate, resulting from social practice and anchored in a certain historical context. People change their identities and forge new ones. While a person's identity can be imposed from the outside to some extent, by someone attempting to categorize him or her as a stranger or an 'other,' self-definition and self-presentation are also at play. . . . [M]ultiple identities were common in the Mediterranean world, thanks to travel and emigration." Kathryn Reyerson, "Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean World of Merchants and Pirates," *Mediterranean Studies* 20 (2012): 129–146, 138.

13. David Nirenberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Past & Present* 174 (2002): 3–41, 6.

14. As Gampel writes, "identity construction is always in process in all societies and all times, and medieval Jews were no exception to this rule." Benjamin Gampel, "The 'Identity' of Sephardim of Medieval Christian Iberia," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 2/3 (2002): 133–138, 137.

15. Ibid. Gampel argues that exceptional cases like Duran's do not tell us much about the average, daily experiences of medieval Jews. I would perhaps add that even an exceptional figure like Duran experienced a "daily life."

16. See Gerli's formulation: "the models of the Hispanic multicultural medieval past . . . are transformed from transparent epistemological processes structured around opposing binary forces into fluid dialogical situations replete with ongoing enunciative efforts that seek continuously to reinscribe the human subject in society. Cultural encounters thus unfold in a process that involves constant displacements that require incessant negotiation and imply continuous transformation. Accordingly, to understand a cultural phenomenon like that of the *conversos*, they must be approached from angles that permit an appreciation of the possibility of a multitude of enunciative positions, conscious of the fact that they do not constitute a unified social reality, but rather a group of heterogeneous, proteic human beings whose practices, beliefs and circumstances could vary significantly." E. Michael Gerli, "The *Converso* Condition: New Approaches to an Old Question," in *Medieval Iberia: Changing Societies and Cultures in Contact and Transition*, ed. I. A. Corfis and R. Harris-Northall (Woodbridge, UK, 2007), 3–15, 4.

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